

Dave Burke

Ventures Reviews, *Pipeline* 1990-2009

In 2008 Dave Burke and I put together a systematic survey of The Ventures' sixties recorded output in *Driving Guitars*, now presented as a free download on this website. As I remarked in the book's Preface, I found Dave's publications on the group, and in particular his incisive and searching reviews, an invaluable point of reference in my attempts to characterise the music of these stellar exponents of guitar-led rock instrumentals. But his contribution to our appreciation of their music extends way beyond that golden decade, illuminating as it does every phase of their long, productive and illustrious career.

I was delighted therefore when Dave, together with his *Pipeline* co-editor Alan Taylor, kindly agreed to place at this website's disposal his entire body of reviews, covering a high proportion of the CDs that really matter. They are reproduced in order of appearance but the closing alphabetised Index Of Titles will enable you to trace a CD effortlessly, while the excellent search facilities of PDFs will provide rapid access to Dave's thoughts on individual tracks.

It's worth bearing in mind that this authoritative magazine also offers features of and interviews with Ventures members and associates penned by Dave and others, and a fair number of back issues can be ordered, just click on this link for information:

<http://www.rhis.co.uk/pipeline/back.htm>

MC

THE VENTURES: 'THE EP COLLECTION': CD
(See For Miles CD 292, UK)

No Trespassing; Night Train; Ram-Bunk-Shush; Lonely Heart; Ups 'n' Downs; Torquay; Bulldog; Meet Mr Callaghan; Trambone; Josie; Yellow Jacket; Bluer Than Blue; Gringo; Moon Dawg; Sunny River; Guitar Twist; Telstar; Percolator; Silver City; Wildwood Flower; Wabash Cannonball; Secret Agent Man; Man From Uncle; Hot Line

If ever a band has suffered at the hands of the compilers then surely it must be The Ventures. In Japan their albums have been dissected and re-assembled until the permutations have become endless and meaningless. In the UK and the States albums that purported themselves to be "The Best Of" - compiled by the disinterested and the ignorant - have been embarrassing disasters leaving Ventures fans making limp excuses, while the uncommitted were left wondering if The Ventures had ever recorded more than four decent tracks in their entire career. So it comes as quite a shock to hear a compilation that is actually approaching excellence. Perhaps because most of The Ventures EPs consisted of the four best tracks (or thereabouts) from each of their early albums it does make it hard to go wrong. Even then, because of the rigidity of sticking to the EP theme, we are denied tracks from Twist Party Volume 2 (no The Twomp) and Going To The Ventures Dance Party (no Gandy Dancer) because no UK EPs were ever issued. An own goal perhaps? And as good as this is I'm still going to do a little bitching. I'm puzzled over the exclusion of the first class Red Top and Orange Fire from The Colourful Ventures EP when the much weaker Percolator and Telstar - from their worst early LP - are both included. Alternatively one or two of the cuts from the Secret Agent Man EP might have been omitted as stylistically they come from The Ventures mid-period (1966) and are slightly at odds with the earlier material here. Still this is all nit-picking when you consider what IS here - and all in stereo with crystal clear sound. The thing about the early Ventures was that they understood the importance of the "moment" - an instant that could suddenly lift a track - better than anyone else. Hence Lonely Heart, a rather undistinguished tune, was lifted several miles by simply dropping in a grand sounding chord midway and then turning it inside out with the whammy bar; Ram-Bunk-Shush was made so much more fascinating by its final resounding chord dramatically changing pitch. No Trespassing is a whole succession of wonderful moments. Howie's simple snare paves the way for the rest of the band to come in with a wall of sound, which swiftly subsides to leave a pulsating beat, and whilst the melody might be slight your attention is rivetted by the constantly developing arrangement which climaxes with the bass quite unexpectedly welling up to follow the lead line and then, just as surprisingly, ends with a guitar line spiralling endlessly out towards the run-out groove. Even when they were ripping-off somebody else's hit like Bulldog, Torquay and Moon Dawg they did it with such panache and polish that they generally ended up improving on the original. On Guitar Twist they unashamedly purloin Ray Charles' What'd I Say riff and demonstrate how cleverly they can extract the maximum mileage from one basic idea by transforming it into an instrumental with considerable tension and atmosphere - making much from little was another speciality. You want

power? How about Yellow Jacket with its dynamic rhythm guitar and scintillating lead break; Moon Dawg with its crashing snare introduction, swiftly bolstered by racing rhythm and throbbing bass which overflows into a rushing torrent of lead guitar. Night Train where Bob can casually afford to sit back on lead, with the knowledge that under the hood there was the superbly tuned Edwards / Wilson / Johnson rhythm engine waiting to provide all the thrust that was needed. Ups 'n' Downs where that rhythmic drive was married to some astonishing lead picking - surely an early appearance of Nokie as front man. And let's not forget the delightful westerner Silver City, which reminds me of when I used to spend my time with Indian scouts, trail bosses, and wagon train leaders - all in London's East End you understand! Thanks to Gerry Woodage for this super compilation and the fine sleeve notes, now perhaps we can persuade Colin Miles that we also need a rarities compilation and a truly definitive Best Of collection - an album that some thirty on is still waiting patiently to be compiled.

#2

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THE VENTURES: 'TRY IT'/ 'WALK, DON'T RUN': CD SINGLE

(Toshiba EMI TODP-2112, Japan)

Evidently this is being used as the backing music to an advert in Japan, although exactly what it is that you are supposed to try I really don't know. I do know that this is rather like a composite instrumental, with snatches of other instros being used to make up the full picture - I spotted bits from Slaughter On 10th Avenue, Wipe Out, Apache, Pipeline, Stop Action and Yellow Jacket - and that's all in 2.45. It is a brilliant production with an outstanding bass solo from Bob Bogle, but it is all sadly wasted when the tune is so utterly derivative. I know lots of people are sick of the classics like Walk Don't Run but I remain so completely captivated that I have to sit down and listen closely the moment it comes on - ah, there it goes again! Available from Gerry Woodage at The Ventures Club.

THE VENTURES: 'PLAY THE SOUTHERN ALL STARS': CD
(Toshiba/ EMI TOCP 6110, Japan)

Furi Furi '65; Miss Brand New Day; The Night Club; Seaside Story; Shiori's Theme; C-Chow Kotoba Ni Goyojin; Omoi Sugoshi No Koi No Uchi; Ellie My Love; Don't Blame On Me; Sinbad

This is an important release for The Ventures, for any band who can leave nearly a ten year gap between new recordings is taking risks. I know the Tridex re-cuts and a couple of CD re-hashes have given the impression of continuity throughout the eighties, but the truth of the matter is that the re-treads were little more than a money-making exercise and the CDs were just a shuffling of The Ventures last proper LP 60's Pops from way back in '81. So this one needs to be good. And very good it is, although I do believe it falls short of the extravagant claims being made for it. The first two tracks really are excellent. Furi Furi boasts a monster riff with Gerry McGee's aggressive lead cutting straight through the mix of thudding drums and pounding piano - the bridge to is unusual with Don Wilson kicking in some Keith Richards style rhythm guitar to add a little raunch to the proceedings. Better still is the clumsily titled Brand New Day. It's a plaintive mid-paced ballad with a tight rhythm and a sneaky little tune that creeps up on you - McGee's lead is brilliant as he uses lots of tones to convey every delicate nuance bound up in the melody - further aided by Dave Carr's delightful little synth flourishes, super! My problems being with the third track, The Night Club. This is given a mild Latin-American treatment - not the full blooded surge of Santana - but a more restrained dilution which sees it heading off dangerously towards MOR territory. Sinbad is given a similarly conga and timbale enriched flavour, whilst Seaside Story and Shiori's Theme both suffer from over-dressing. I would guess that the blame for this probably lies with Dave Carr, who (as in the past) seizes every opportunity to submerge The Ventures in sweetening, either with syrupy keyboards or gentle vocal group backings. Everything is put back on the right track though with C-Chow Kotoba. Another big production job, but here everything is balanced just right - the heavenly femme vocal group and the tender toned organ provide the sensitive backdrop to Gerry's poignant lead guitar. Ellie My Love is equally sensitive, but is more of a romantic ballad - perfect smooching music with some warm sax from Michael Rose. Both Omoi Sugoshi and Don't Blame Me see the band moving back into top gear, with the former utilising a hard, modern drum sound from Mel Taylor, good synth from Dave Carr, and most of all plenty of amazing lead from McGee. Don't Blame Me exposes a similar vitality opening with a cousin of the Let's Go ensemble handclapping before moving briskly into a flowing guitar showcase, with Michael Rose's sax joining to spur McGee to ever greater heights. To sum up then, what we have here are three absolutely first rate cuts with a supporting cast that is never much less than very good indeed. For me it fails to hit excellence because of its production values which too often give the impression of (very) high quality MOR. Maybe that suits you fine - me, I view MOR in the same way that Dracula views the cross. The most striking aspect of this CD

though is the undeniable mastery of Gerry McGee who - perhaps because these longer tracks give him more room to stretch out - turns in a performance that will convince even the most die-hard Edwards fan that he is in the same exalted class. Not then quite the classic that I was hoping for, but it is easily good enough to show that the magic is still intact, and with a rock 'n' roll producer like Jeff Baxter in charge of their next project it maybe that this is just the starter for the main meal to come. Here's hoping.



THE VENTURES

"THE 30th ANNIVERSARY SUPER SESSION"
(Toshiba/EMI WK 048-3020H, Japan)

Video

I've seen several videos of Ventures live performances before and it has to be admitted that whilst they do still give great instrumental rock'n'roll, they are visually as exciting as a wet Monday morning. Fantastic if you are there to soak up the atmosphere and feel the warm vibration of the music hitting your body, but in the cold analytical mood of the living room they rate dullsville. This - a celebration of The Ventures 30 years in the biz - is different. It serves the twin tasks of giving a concise rundown of the history of the band narrated in turn by Don, Bob, Mel and Nokie and illustrated with a series of vintage stills, alongside some glowing tributes from numerous rock stars both in word and music as they guest with The Ventures for some scintillating performances. Believe me any band that can begin with "Wipe Out" - featuring Bruce Springsteen's E-Street Band drummer Max Weinberg - and has Max and Mel swapping drum solos as well as playing in tandem, spurred on by Nokie's furious guitar runs, and follow it with ease has to have something going for it! Check this guest list: Al Di Meola, guitarist with The Cars Elliot Easton, Joey and Marky Ramone of der Ramones, Jeff Baxter (formerly of Steely Dan and The Doobie Brothers), Peter Frampton, Rick Derringer, The Raybeats Chris Spedding, one time leader of The New York Dolls David Johanson, Jeff Cook of Alabama, Josie Cotton, and Robbie Krieger from The Doors, and the aforementioned Max Weinberg on loan from the Boss. The Ventures certainly seem inspired by working with such illustrious guests - a feeling that is obviously mutual. Who would have ever thought that we would one day see Chris Spedding and Peter Frampton lined up with The Ventures for a knockout "Pipeline"; Robby Krieger tearing through "Perfidia" and "Bumble Bee"; Rick Derringer - after relating how he had named The McCoys after The Ventures track - zipping into a tasty "Memphis" complete with Rick & Bob swinging guitars in unison! Perhaps the best of the lot though is seeing the full line-up of The Raybeats and The Ventures freaking out with an eerie, spacey "Out Of Limits" - sensational! Still more? How about "Apache" (with Peter Frampton), "Telstar" (with Chris Spedding), "Secret Agent Man" (with Josie Cotton's vocal), and "Sleepwalk" and "Tequila" both boasting ace guitarist Jeff Baxter - remember his hot solos on Steely Dan's "Reelin' In The Years"? Plus fine alone performances from The Ventures on "Slaughter On 10th Avenue", "Let's Go", and "Walk Don't Run". Another nice touch is Mike Kuhn's (Ventures US Club Leader) introduction of Gerry McGee, who recalls how he was invited to join The Ventures - just a pity that they didn't take the opportunity of teaming Gerry with Nokie for a number. One of my favourite moments though is supplied by New York Doll David Johanson who delivers a powerful Eric Burdon-like vocal on "House Of The Rising Sun" with much dramatic effect - playing to the crowd, he finally drops to his knees and turning slightly to Nokie he gives a knowing wink which leaves the normally poker faced Edwards beaming broadly! But that is the best thing about the whole video - the sense of good vibes comes over again and again - it's smiles, hugs and handshakes all round and really it's all quite warming. I can't sum it up better than Joey Ramone who succinctly mumbles "The Ventures are classic and will always remain that way". Amen.

Obtaining one of these videos might be tricky - but Ventures fans should sell their Grannies if neccessary! Mike Kuhn's Spring 1990 Newsletter was giving the following information: available for \$30.00 - P&H domestic \$3.00, \$10.00 overseas - from Fraker Productions, 12 East 46th Street, 5th Floor, New York, New York 10017. Please note that we have had no dealings with this company so you would be well advised to write first before sending any money. You should also be aware that American videos will not play through normal UK or European televisions, our copy appears to be a professional conversion but was bought secondhand so we are unable to help any more at present.

DB

THE VENTURES
‘LEGENDARY MASTERS – THE BEST OF THE VENTURES’: CD
(EMI CDP 7-93451-2 USA & UK)

Walk Don't Run; No Trespassing; Perfidia; Ram-Bunk-Shush; Lullaby Of The Leaves; Yellow Jacket; Driving Guitars; Road Runner; Twisted; Spudnik; Night Drive; 2,000lb Bee Parts 1 & 2; The Savage; Moon Child; Journey To The Stars; The Fugitive; Walk Don't Run '64; Pedal Pusher; Slaughter On Tenth Avenue; Diamond Head; Action Plus; Dick Tracy; Flights Of Fantasy; Underground Fire; Hawaii Five-O; Rocketing Rhythm Interview; Twist Party Radio Spot; Hawaii Five-O Radio Spot; Underground Fire Radio Spot

Breaking a tradition of decades, we finally get a US/UK Best Of The Ventures which does not disgrace its title. A legitimate Best Of would have to contain all the biggest hit singles which - Secret Agent Man apart - this does. The problem usually arises in the secondary category of non-hits where previously quality has always been sacrificed in favour of title strength. Compilers Ron Furmanek and Steve Kolanjian have realised that the surest way to achieve a genuinely reputable Best Of was to ask a fan, and so the choices here have been mainly made by Paul Hippensteel. Of course any two Ventures fans would probably come up with two entirely different lists, but at least this approach ensures a degree of legitimacy. So whadaya get? There's the joy of hearing all the hits in there newly digitalised stereo clarity (you can even hear some muffled notes on Ram-Bunk-Shush); there's also the early heartstoppers like Yellow Jacket and Driving Guitars; the hypnotic version of The Wailers' Road Runner; Nokie Edwards' punning Spudnik (a King Edwards composition?) perhaps better known by its alternate title of Surf Rider (courtesy of The Lively Ones); and the dramatic, menacing Night Drive from the under-rated Going To The Ventures Dance Party LP (why no Gandy Dancer, Paul?); on the rarities side there is Dick Tracy (previously only available on the Japanese Rarities compilation) sounding very much as though it could have been included on the Batman album - excellent it is too! Equally good are the other rare-ish The Savage - a blistering version of The Shadows hit - and the classic 2,000lb Bee with part one being in mono (the stereo mix has been lost) and part two a stereo version previously only used on The Versatile Ventures compilation (to my mind this is an inferior mix as it omits the stinging lead guitar overlay to be found on the 45). Reports of alternate takes are exaggerated unless you think Mel Taylor's count-ins of "1-2-3" and the odd faltering halt instead of a fade-out are of earth-shattering importance. The cuts from The Ventures mid-sixties period - WDR'64, Diamond Head, Journey To The Stars, Slaughter On Tenth Avenue amongst others - are to my mind some of the best intros EVER made. At a creative peak, flushed with success and afforded the best studio help available, The Ventures absorbed all the cleverest ideas from the surf scene, assimilated them into their own style and then gave re-birth to them as the most innovative and smartly arranged instrumentals to ever see the light of day. During this period just about everything they touched turned to gold and tracks like Moon Child, Pedal Pusher, The Fugitive and Action Plus all bristle with class and quality. The three one minute radio spots tagged on at the end are nothing more than historical curios, although the six minute

interview with Don Wilson and Bob Bogle recorded in July 1961 is a little more revealing. Presentation is first rate with good liner notes, a nostalgic photo montage of the early LP sleeves, and even the resurrected Dolton design in its original pale blue on the CD itself. An excellent package and it's at mid-price - a MUST!

THE VENTURES: 'THE VENTURES': CD
(Object Enterprises ONN 50, UK)

Walk Don't Run; Apache; Slaughter On Tenth Avenue; Diamond Head; Lullaby Of The Leaves; Caravan; Pipeline; Joy; Over The Rainbow; Hawaii Five-O; Perfidia; Let's Go

I bought this for a bargain £1.99 down my local market from a stall-holder who probably doesn't even know who The Ventures are. But he does know what is cheap, and while the price maybe nice, the last thing we want to see is the name of The Ventures relegated to the junk end of the market. To make matters worse these are not the original recordings, nor even the ubiquitous Tridex re-cuts but a separate bunch of re-recordings known as the Red Dog tapes which are now showing up throughout the world on numerous budget labels of dubious origin. Probably recorded sometime during the early seventies, and (I speculate) most likely around the time of the Rocky Road debacle when The Ventures seemed briefly prepared to relenquish their name to sessioneers led by Ben Benay. The word is that there may well be some Ventures input but details of its exact extent are hazy. Anyway, the tracks feature barely competent and positively uninspired versions of the hits with un-Ventures sounding lead guitar, some gross synthesiser tarting up, and some horrendous rhapsodic style piano on Slaughter On Tenth Avenue. The drumbeat is generally over-emphasised in the simplistic disco vein that was especially common during the seventies. It gets worse - the wonderful arrangement to the original Diamond Head is completely ditched in favour of a nondescript run-through, ditto Lullaby Of The Leaves which is just a travesty of the classic. Caravan is terrible with an awful trumpet-like synth being added to the guitar lead, both of which are occasionally drowned out by synth-drums. Pipeline and Joy are bearable simply because they are such great melodies and can withstand this kind of crude assault. I have to admit despite the disco beat I did rather enjoy Over The Rainbow primarily because it makes a good use of the WDR chord sequence, has some nice lead guitar, and someone has actually put a little thought into the arrangement. Hawaii Five-O boasts a crazed timbale player who is obviously being paid by the beat and so tries to get in as many as he possibly can. Perfidia is treated respectfully although it's no match for the original, and Let's Go sounds worryingly like it might in fact be The Ventures. Apart from that and the odd bright spot like Over The Rainbow I have to conclude that the word I'm looking for to best describe the contents is - tragic.

THE VENTURES: 'THE VENTURES CHRISTMAS ALBUM': CD
(EMI CDP 7 94994 2, USA & UK)

Sleigh Ride; Snow Flakes; Santa Claus Is Coming To Town; Jingle Bells; Jingle Bell Rock; Silver Bells; Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer; Frosty The Snowman; Scrooge; Blue Christmas; We Wish You A Merry Christmas; White Christmas

Here's a theoretical question - if you were EMI and had the opportunity to re-issue one of The Ventures LPs on CD completely re-mixed and re-mastered which one would you choose? How many of you answered The Christmas Album? None? That's what I thought. Crazy, isn't it? Nevertheless EMI have coughed up the money to get Larry Walsh and Ron Furmanek to do a proper digital transfer and the results are first class. (Un) Seasonal doubts aside, let's not forget that this is a wonderful album - the instrumental genre's equivalent of Phil Spector's celebrated Christmas LP really. The idea of grafting traditional Xmas tunes onto the skeletons of numerous classic hits with, for example, Tequila suddenly becoming Frosty The Snowman and I Feel Fine metamorphosing into Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer - was so staggeringly simple and yet so utterly brilliant that at first hearing The Ventures sheer impudence left most speechless. Once the shock had subsided though it was obvious that most of the treatments handed out were well crafted and worked exceptionally well. White Christmas - a tune mercilessly hammered over the years - actually had its heart restored by their sensitive handling (based on their own earlier treatment of Blue Star and Stranger On The Shore) to once again make it the most moving of Christmas melodies. The same is true of Silver Bells which borrows from their arrangement of Only The Young from The Fabulous Ventures set, and duplicates the same richly warm, yielding feel. On the uptempo side the In Crown blueprint lends a swing to We Wish You A Merry Christmas, and Jingle Bell Rock packs a punch courtesy of Memphis, whilst The Searchers sound on Blue Christmas (based on When You Walk In The Room) is mighty appealing. Best of the lot though (and it gets my vote as the best ever Xmas intro) is Leroy Anderson's made-in-heaven melody Sleigh Ride which, when dressed up in The Ventures own Walk Don't Run costume, emerges as a real Christmas cracker. So what if you've already got the original LP? Even then you don't escape from having to buy this, because not only is the general sound quality much improved but there is the odd difference that crops up, most noticeably a complete second harmony lead on Rudolf that was somehow omitted from the original mix! Not that all the differences are that obvious - or that many - but there are enough subtle enhancements to make the return listening journey through this quite rewarding. For once a Christmas recording with no turkeys - Merry Crimbo everybody!

THE VENTURES "THE INTERVIEW TAPE" cassette
(VSFC MC-108-15; Sweden)

The Ventures' Scandinavian tour of 1989 has been well documented and their local fan club has a number of audio recordings on offer as well as the excellent video we reviewed in Pipeline 5 (page 9). What we have here is an interesting memento of that tour. Interesting and unusual I think you'll agree when you hear that it comprises radio interviews with the group, interviews they gave to the fan club, and even some interviews with the fans themselves. Parts are in Swedish of course but there is sufficient English dialogue to make this worth investigating for Ventures completists. Write to the Ventures Scandinavian Fan Club at: Moravagen 27, S-78200 Malung, Sweden.

THE VENTURES "LIVE IN JAPAN 1990" video
(Toshiba-EMI TOVW-3065; Japan)



Medley: Walk, Don't Run-Perfidia-Lullaby Of The Leaves / Apache / Manchurian Beat / Hokkaido Skies / Miss Brand New Day / Diamond Head / Wipe Out / The House Of The Rising Sun / Ellie My Love / Paint It Black / Chako (A Seaside Story) / Slaughter On 10th Avenue / Pipeline / Stars On Guitars / Caravan

The video of the live CD reviewed in our last issue (page 39), but it's not just another predictable Ventures performance. There are certain tracks they have to play but this 50 minute selection has a generous helping of less common material. The acoustic feature is "Hokkaido Skies" and then there are the more recent tracks "Miss Brand New Day", "Ellie My Love" and "Chako" which have a lighter, melodic style compared to the usual fare of RI hits. The whole group are on fine form, looking fit and clearly enjoying themselves. Mel Taylor is as great as ever and "Caravan" is still the best drum solo around, in fact it is the only one worth watching these days. Bob Bogle plays fluent lead for the opening medley before switching to bass and Don Wilson excels on rhythm, clearly still enjoying "Pipeline". For a group to whom two steps forward would normally constitute a complex stage routine, this show is positively athletic. Don and Jerry McGee cross over for a few bars then Jerry joins Mel on the drum podium during "Wipe Out" as the two original Ventures, Bob and Don, get together centre stage. Jerry's approach to being a Venture is, dare I say it, adventurous. Whilst Nokie Edwards stood motion-(and emotion)-less, effortlessly throwing out note-perfect copies of the recorded versions, Jerry is looser yet more involved. He takes risks as he sets off on some minor detours but always threads his way back in a couple of notes. He seems most at home on "House Of The Rising Sun" where he turns in a long flowing solo while stepping down off the stage and walking around the audience, it's certainly my favourite performance here. The one strange track selection is "Stars On Guitars" which includes snippets from several of the numbers already played, most odd. Altogether it is a highly enjoyable set and particularly pleasing to pick up the good vibrations coming from these seasoned musicians.
(Copies are available from the Ventures Scandinavian Club, Moravagen 27, S-78200 Malung Sweden.)

THE VENTURES "THE BEST OF LIVE!" CD
(Toshiba-EMI TOCP-6602 Japan)

Medley: Walk Don't Run/Perfidia/Lullaby Of The Leaves;Telstar;
Driving Guitars;Apache;Yellow Jacket;Slaughter On Tenth Avenue;
Bumble Bee Twist;Bulldog;The House Of The Rising Sun;Out Of Limits;
Penetration;The Cruel Sea;Pipeline;Surf Rider;Diamond Head;
Walk Don't Run '64;Wipe Out;Ginza Lights;A Taste Of Honey;
Kimi To Itsumademo;Yozora No Hoshi;La Bamba;California Dreamin';
Batman Theme;The Man From Uncle;Secret Agent Man;007-11;Caravan.

In the early sixties I remember thinking that there must be some sort of competition to find who could produce the worst live LP. Cliff & The Shadows otherwise brilliant live album was for me completely ruined by the random adolescent screaming. Chuck Berry's "On Stage" turned out to be the same studio cuts but with dubbed on applause, while Bo Diddley's live "Beach Party" set was so distorted that sand in the amplification could be the only explanation. When I eventually decided to give live albums another shot it was with The Ventures "On Stage". I spent some time trying to figure out what the trick was. Sure on side 2 there was all that diabolical screaming half drowning out what ever was being played, but on side 1 something else was going on. Not only did the band sound clear and dynamic beyond belief but the audience response was contained within the intervals between tracks. The Ventures had discovered the worlds perfect audience in the Japanese - and seemingly the best sound engineers as well. Later on the super-groups of the early seventies were still trundling their massive mobile studios around trying to capture a good "live" sound when The Ventures had already shown how it was done some five years earlier. Anyway, during the period 1965-1968 The Ventures produced a string of live albums of unparalleled quality and unmatched dynamism. This compilation draws from three of them - 18 tracks from "All About The Ventures", 2 from "Live Again" and 8 from "Encore". They stick largely to the studio arrangements of the featured tunes so if you've not heard them don't expect any major re-interpretations, although Edwards does throw in extra licks here and there so that they are not carbon copies either. Their real attraction though is the power and attack with which they are played. Never before has an instrumental band sounded quite so ferocious as this. Tempos are speeded up to stress the high energy levels and the result is an adrenalin surge that is without comparison. "Batman" for example is played so fast that it could almost be mistaken for todays "speed metal" (heavy metal played at breakneck speed). Perhaps The Ventures simply wanted to get through it all as quickly as possible, or maybe they were inspired by the level of adulation that they were receiving at that time in Japan, or maybe they were just very, very high - whatever the reason - their live work of this period portrayed stunning musicianship and makes for scintillating instrumental rock'n'roll. The 18 cuts culled from "All About The Ventures" are virtually the same core of tracks that have served them so well down the years - you know "Pipeline", "Wipe Out", "Caravan" etc. - which really represents my only criticism which is that this grouping has been so regularly aired. Still, these are the definitive live versions and I guess that any "Best Of Live" would have to include them by definition. The 8 cuts from "Encore" are especially enjoyable though because tracks like "La Bamba" and "California Dreaming" etc are less heard but certainly no less good than the main staples that we have grown so used to. What is needed now is a Volume 2 to mop up all those less familiar tracks that have been omitted here. Meanwhile if you would like a selection of the hottest live instrumentals ever laid down, then listen to these extraordinary performances.

DB

THE VENTURES

"THE RARITIES"

CD

(Pendleton PC-101, Japan)

The Real McCoy (Take 1)/The Real McCoy (Take 2)/Cookies & Coke (V)
 (Take 1)/Cookies & Coke (V) (Take 2)/The McCoy/Blue Moon/
 Instant Mashed/Lucille/The Ninth Wave/Tarantula/The Chase/
 Night Run/Scratch/Adventures In Paradise/Candy Apple Racer/
 Rap City/Green Hornet Theme/Apache.

Who ever put this together knew precisely what they were doing, for just about every major Ventures rarity - the sort that serious Ventures collectors would kill for - is present and correct. The pre "Walk Don't Run" single ("Cookies & Coke"/"The Real McCoy") is there - AND there are two takes of both. There's even both sides ("Night Run"/"Scratch") of the Nokie Edwards single from his pre-Ventures band The Marksmen. Plus all the rarities most of us have ever only dreamed of owning: "Tarantula", "Adventures In Paradise", "Candy Apple Racer" and "The Green Hornet Theme" (this time our compilers have got it right using the correct Billy May composed tune, and not the similarly titled track from the "Batman" LP as King did on their eighties rarities compilation). The second category of inclusions - rare mixes of well known tracks - I am slightly less happy with. For example "Blue Moon" and "Rap City" are here because they are in mono, "Lucille" and "The Ninth Wave" because they have an added vocal chorus, and "The Chase" because it has motorcycle noises grafted on (the same cut without the noises is known as "Solar Race"). To me these are curios rather than true rarities, although I doubt that the kind of fan who sees nothing odd in buying two identical records just because they have different coloured labels is ever going to agree with me! "The McCoy" is not quite in the aforementioned category as it sounds to have been recorded at a different time to its better known LP counterpart, and therefore merits inclusion. In fact this is the same riff that The Ventures also used as the flip to "Cookies & Coke", the main difference being that the earlier version featured Don Wilson's spoken novelty interjections and was titled "The Real McCoy". These earliest tracks are perhaps the most revealing. "The Real McCoy" is raw and dirty and not unlike Link Wray whilst, in contrast, its vocal flip has Bob and Don sounding like a college rockabilly band - unsurprisingly the guitar break is the standout part of the track. On the other hand The Marksmen's two super cuts sound the most like the formative Ventures, emphasising the amount of influence Edwards must have contributed at these early stages. "Night Run" is full blooded beat, like "Yellow Jacket" in character, whilst "Scratch" was later recorded by The Ventures themselves as well as becoming something of a standard with the surf bands. (By the way "Night Run" uses a theme from Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsodies" which The Ventures also pressed into action as "Rap City" (rhapsody - geddit) which is also to be found within). The other musical highspot must be "Tarantula". This is an Italian folk dance that is instantly recognisable as a kind of party jig or reel. It is highly invigorating and splendidly done, and could have been one of those surprise Xmas hits had it been properly promoted. "Adventures In Paradise" is an intriguing inclusion. It comes from the most famed of Ventures rarities - LP BG101 - an entire album that was recorded but never commercially released. Sound quality throughout this CD is pretty good considering that all tracks have been taped from disc, with only the rarest bearing some surface noise. The only disappointment for me is the omission of "El Greco" - a cut that can be valued as much for its musical quality as its rarity. Perhaps a volume 2 might follow with that and the remainder of LP BG101? Meanwhile Ventures fans might do well to grab this as an authorised rarities compilation seems to be no closer to fruition.

DB

THE VENTURES

"PLAY SEASIDE STORY"

CD

(EMI-Toshiba TOCP-6740, Japan)

Fruit Of Summer; Surfside Dream; Truth; Seychelles; The Lady Wants To Know; What You Won't Do For Love; Breezin'; Fragrance Of Thrill; Love Storm; We're All Alone; Fall In Love; If We Hold On Together.

"Seaside Story" follows up last year's surprise Japanese success with "The Ventures Play Southern All Stars". It continues broadly in the same style as its predecessor but, I'm pleased to report, is a far stronger set. The tendency in "Southern All Stars" to drop into Latin flavoured MOR stylings has thankfully been dispensed with. Instead what we have here is a very much hipper version of MOR. It almost seems as if The Ventures have suddenly discovered the late seventies - you know George Benson, Gabor Szabo - all those West Coast cats with their hearts in jazz and their minds on the laid back LA lifestyle. Tracks like "Breezin'" and "Seychelles" are just like wall-to-wall sunshine - mellow, glossy, opulent - and you can see yourself in that sporty open topped coupe cruising through the permanently sun-drenched Californian landscape (blond at the side, natch.). Most of the US sourced songs here originate from the 70s - Bobby Womack's "Breezin'" was a big hit for George Benson in '76; Bobby Caldwell's "What You Won't Do For Love" is from '78; Rita Coolidge's "We're All Alone" scored in '77; and Michael Frank's "The Lady Wants To Know" was also popular during the 70s. In a completely different style (but still in the 70s) "Truth" is a heavy metal workout that could almost have come from Ronnie Montrose. It's great too - a whumping beat with lashings of molten, screaming guitar from guest Jeff Baxter (one time Steely Dan man and Doobie Brother), who struggles manfully to overcome the fierce soloing of fellow guest Edgar Winter (more 70s connections!) on alto sax, while Don Wilson, not to be outdone, throws in some of those dynamic Pipeline slides to add to the melee! And if you are thinking that referring to this as "seventies-ish" is some kind of subtle put down - it's not. I guess that most of us would prefer the sixties sounds of their golden age, but failing that, this will do very nicely. It's not rock'n'roll but it does sound great and is far more worthy than the conventional strain of MOR that they flirted with during their dismal early 70s period. In any event, there is no doubt that Gerry McGee is right at home here for his performances are superb - he breathes life into "Fruit Of Summer", carresses "Fall In Love", and builds Boz Scaggs' beautiful melody "We're All Alone" into a triumph of soulful playing. Not that it is all McGee's show - listen to Don Wilson enjoying himself on the sprightly, "La Bamba"-ish "Surfside Dream" with his bustling rhythm guitar well to the fore. "Breezin'" is another big success, with colourful synths setting the scene for Bob Bogle's heavy duty bass line, then a mellow lead guitar partnered by flutes floats in amidst warm, rolling waves of synths - lovely! "Seychelles" is in a similar mould with a lazy, holiday swing to it - all palm trees and tans - it's a nice little tune and features jazzy solos from McGee and Winter on sax. The solitary disappointment of the whole set is "Love Storm" which comes across as slightly corny and is not helped by a naff vocal chorus. By contrast the other Japanese originals - "Fruit Of Summer", "Fall In Love", "Fragrance Of Thrill" - seem to grow in stature with every play. I found "Seaside Story" a very rewarding listen, and it should also appeal to Shadows fans just as much as to Ventures loyalists so give it a try. The Ventures may just have discovered the acceptable face of MOR.

DB

#13

Pipeline 13 [1992] 49

THE VENTURES

"POPS IN JAPAN"

CD

(EMI-Toshiba TOCP-6301, Japan)

Blue Chateau;Hallelujah;Sentimental Guitar;Wakareta-Hito-To;
Tokyo Nights;Slow Sundown;Hokkaido Skies;Kono-Tenohirani-Aio;
Rainy Pavement;Yokohama Lights;Black Sand Beach;Road To Somewhere;
Kyoto Doll;Stranger In Midosuji;Reflections In A Palace Lake;
Nagasaki Memories;Ginza Lights;Kimi-To-Itsumademo;Yozora-No-Hoshi;
Blue Sunset.

A superior release from Toshiba's current re-issue programme of Ventures' material. This is the bands 1967 LP "Pops In Japan" in its entirety plus an extra eight tracks. Quite why Toshiba did not put it out with Volume 2 tacked on is unknown but, of course, record companies move in mysterious ways. In any case, given that the other re-issues are your 12 track barely 30 minute jobs, this 20 tracker counts as almost generous. "Pops In Japan" was the bands first studio LP aimed specifically at the Japanese market, and the simple idea of "let's pinch the best tunes from the charts and mix them with some of our own originals" worked just as well in Japan as it had done in the States. The gentle, more melodious style that came to characterise their Japanese "Pops" material is in evidence here. Acoustic lead on "Wakareta-Hito-To" and "Hokkaido Skies" for example, and pretty ballads like "Kono-Tenohirani-Aio" are par for the course. Not that the slow numbers were in complete ascendance - this was '67 remember - so there was still room for rocky cuts like "Tokyo Nights" with Wilson's busy rhythm guitar and Taylor rolling around his kit, and "Yokohama Lights" with Nokie running through his arsenal of hot licks. There is also some first division stuff in the shape of "Ginza Lights", the superb "Black Sand Beach" and the just as good "Yozora-No-Hoshi", resplendent with a beaty surf style rhythm. In fact virtually all The Ventures best Japanese studio material is here, with beautiful ballads like "Kimi-To-Itsumademo" and "Reflections In A Palace Lake" (surely one of McGee's best ever performances) adding the icing to the cake. If you have yet to sample their Japanese studio "Pops" and are wondering where to start, then this is the perfect place.

DB

THE VENTURES

"PLAY MAJOR MOTION PICTURE THEMES"
(EMI-Toshiba TOCP-6775, Japan)

CD

Unchained Melody; Axel F/Miami Vice Theme; Stand By Me; St Elmo's Fire;
Ghostbusters; What A Wonderful World; Oh Pretty Woman; The Gremlin Rag;
One; Never Ending Story; Chariots Of Fire; Arthur's Theme.

The track listing on this had me sharpening my axe with a vengeance. Nothing like a little critical bloodletting to stir things up, right? I mean look at those titles - it seems like one of those Shadows market research jobs that they churn out these days dunnit? Anyway, no sooner had the dismissive jibes and smart put downs began to form when I noticed that I was actually beginning to enjoy this. Oh, no, it looks as if my hip factor rating is gonna slide off the scale again! "Unchained Melody" started the rot. It's a beautiful tune and McGee wrings every shred of emotion from it with a good arrangement that uses solo cello and a small string section (synths?). By contrast "Axel F etc" (a blend of the Miami Vice and Beverley Hills Cop themes) is ultra-modern sounding with heavy duty synthesizers presenting these infuriatingly catchy tunes, and including a burning solo from McGee when he finally shows up. "St Elmo's Fire" is typical American AOR - all crashing cymbals, resounding chords, and stirring guitar themes - it works too. "What A Wonderful World" is such a lot of schmaltz that that it is easy to overlook what a good melody it is. Bob takes the lead on this and shows us again what an attractive and distinctive style he still has - why doesn't he do it more often? "Ghostbusters" is of course complete nonsense - but enormous fun just the same. Not that it's all great. "Chariots Of Fire" is such a ponderous melody that I couldn't help thinking how better it suited Hank Marvin's style

4

than McGee's. "Stand By Me" is a song that was lifted several miles by Ben E King's towering vocal performance. Keeping faithfully to Leiber and Stoller's original minimalist arrangement does The Ventures no favours. When John Lennon recorded it for his "Rock'n'Roll" album he was smart enough to realize that the song didn't stand so well on its own and changed it to a much fuller arrangement, and his version succeeds where as The Ventures doesn't. These are the only two lowspots though. "Oh Pretty Woman" sounds better to me than their sixties version - it's fuller and more powerful here. "One" sounds distinctly French with lots of classy organ from Dave Carr, although this could be an erroneous perception on my part as I'm told that the film wasn't set in France. C'est la vie! Best of the lot is "Never Ending Story" with a rippling synthesiser fleshing out what is a decidedly noble sounding guitar theme. Most impressive. Soooo, as ever, it's not the rock'n'roll bonanza most diehard Ventures fans would like to hear but it is a classy, state of the art production of a bunch of decent popular tunes delivered with some panache. Not bad at all. I must be going soft.

DB (with apologies to JB)

#15
Pipeline 13 [1992] 50-51

THE VENTURES "VENTURES SCANDANAVIAN FAN CLUB 25th ANNIVERSARY CASSETTE"
 (VSEFC MC 108-18, Sweden)

Cookies & Coke (V); The Real McCoy; Tarantella; Green Hornet Theme; Samovar;
 Squaw Man; Beautiful Sunday; Joy Ride; Hawaii 5-0 (live '90) - THE VENTURES
 Scratchin'; Night Run - THE MARKSMEN (featuring Nokie Edwards)
 Black Friday; Shadow Of Peking; Love Knot Machine; Summer Of '42 - JOHN DURRILL
 Walkin'; Blues Train; Solitude; Jam Up; On The Rebound; Unknown Soldier;
 Moonlight Surfin'; Cajun Guitar; Twilight Zone (V); I Wonder (V) - GERRY MCGEE
 Muddy Mississippi Line; Land Of 1,000 Dances - NOKIE EDWARDS
 No Matter What Shape (V); Bad Boy (V); The Twomp (V);
 Heart On My Sleeve (V) - DON WILSON
 Route 66 (take 1) (V); Route 66 (take 2) (V); Japanese Title (V) -
 THE VENTURES WITH JAPANESE SINGERS.
 Brief interview with Dick Clark on "American Bandstand" 1969.

Here is a convenient way to get lots of Ventures rarities - over 30 of 'em - at a single stroke. There are the major early sixties rarities "Cookies & Coke" and its flip "The Real McCoy", "Tarantella", "The Green Hornet", plus the two cuts from Nokie Edwards' pre-Ventures band The Marksmen - all of which are fine quality tracks, except perhaps for "Cookies" & "McCoy" which make up in fascination for what they may lack in polish. The other Ventures cuts stem from the seventies and feature Gerry McGee playing lead on the fairly good "Beautiful Sunday" and "Joy Ride", and the very much better "Squaw Man" and "Samovar". Where this cassette really scores though is with the generous amount of solo scarcities - some of which are virtually impossible to find. There is no less than ten McGee tracks, most (if not all) being cut in the early to mid-sixties for the Reprise label with Don Costa providing orchestral background (but not overpoweringly so). They are uniformly fine, McGee's rootsy guitar oscillating between country and blues. "Walkin'" is a bold country strut sweetened with strings, whilst "Blues Train" is a strolling 12 bar with wailing harmonica. Floyd Cramer's "On The Rebound" has never sounded brighter or perkier although by comparison "Unknown Soldier" is sad and reflective and complemented by sombre "last post"-like muted trumpets. Gerry's vocal cuts - "Twilight Zone" and "I Wonder" - also tread a mournful path although they are no less enjoyable because of that. "Moonlight Surfin'" and "Cajun Guitar" take first prize - the former has a warm, flowing feel to it, and the latter a powerful thrusting beat upon which Gerry lays a catchy little theme. From the early to mid-sixties again comes the four Don Wilson vocals - "Heart On My Sleeve" utilizes the WDR sequence to good effect, whilst "The Twomp" is yet another stab at the track that originated from the "Twist Party Vol 2" set (both are different takes to those that appeared on Gerry Woodage's rarities tape). "No Matter What Shape" is Don being jokey with his silly voices in '66 and I can't help thinking that he is a better guitarist

50

than comic - our gain thankfully. "Bad Boy" sounds like possibly a later recording by virtue of its country-ish accompanying guitar - it's nice too. The strange thing about the Nokie Edwards cuts is how much they sound like Gerry McGee...swampy and soulful...it's almost as if Nokie was saying "I can do that" - hmmm. The four John Durrill tracks are from '72 and are quite pleasant, their big productions betraying their performers ambitions as an orchestral leader. Sound quality is generally reasonable considering that several tracks have obviously been taped from crackley old singles - a good Maxell tape was used for my sample and once I had slapped in Dolby B the sound was quite acceptable. Ventures fans should be well pleased with this - I mean how else are you gonna get this stuff? Available from: Arild Pettersson, Morav. 27, 782 00 Malung, Sweden. Europe £10; worldwide \$20 (cash only) including air mail.

DB

THE VENTURES

"THE VERY BEST OF THE VENTURES"
(Rainbow 2RCD 057/058, Australia)

Double CD

Honky Tonk; Last Night; Smokie; Rumble; You Can't Sit Down; Ram-Bunk-Shush;
20-75; Guitar Boogie Shuffle; Raunchy; Soul Twist; Sleep Walk;
Also Sprach Zarathustra; Everybody's Talking; The Man With The Golden
Gun; Last Tango In Paris; Theme From Shaft; The Sound Of Silence;
The Good, The Bad And The Ugly; Georgy Girl; Theme From "Airport 1975";
The Morning After; Live And Let Die; Pink Panther Theme; Dueling Banjos;
Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head; Bonnie & Clyde; Lawrence Of Arabia.

From the ecology point of view this is perfect. Two CDs brilliantly engineered into a normal single size case - full marks. In contrast American CDs now seem to come with "double the waste" carton packaging (whoops, there goes another rain forest). End of sermon. The title is complete cobbler - they really mean "The Best Of The Ventures That We Could Licence". In actual fact this is your now standard 2-for-1 good deal with '72's "Rock'n'Roll Forever" on one disc and the 1976 compilation "Now Playing" on the second. I was quite excited by news of "R&R Forever" back in the early seventies. The Ventures had just done their best to ruin their standing with a run of dismal MOR albums and a return to the roots seemed like a sound idea. Boy, was I disappointed. No Nokie, no Gerry - instead there was Jackie Kelso on sax and Harvey Mandel deputising on the most un-Ventures like guitar lead. With a twenty year breathing space and a less narrow attitude it actually seems very good. Basically this was The Ventures freed from the constraint of lead guitarist as frontman, paying tribute to the more sexual soul and R&B hits of the sixties. As ever the Taylor, Wilson, Bogle engine room provides a powerful thrust and, though a mite contrived, their hollers of encouragement to their stand-in soloists adds a touch of good time raucousness to the proceedings. Surprisingly they make a fairly decent job of getting down into the Memphis soul groove, and even Bill Black would have probably given a favourable nod to the likes of "Smokie", "20-75", "Last Night" and "Honky Tonk". Most of the tracks are spiced up with organ from Dave Carr which turns out to be an effective ploy, especially on "You Can't Sit Down" and "Last Night". There is not really a dud here and "Guitar Boogie Shuffle" and "Sleep Walk" are as good a versions as you will find anywhere. In retrospect I would rate this as The Ventures best album of the seventies. And, hey, did I mention dismal MOR LPs earlier? The second CD bears a collection of film themes that are largely drawn from just those albums. "Only Hits", "10th Anniversary", "Million Dollar Weekend" - these are the guilty parties. Admittedly there is the odd half decent cut like the haunting "Last Tango In Paris" and the jaunty "Georgy Girl" but the majority of the rest are fairly forgettable. The exception is the sixties rarity "Lawrence Of Arabia" - this is vintage Ventures with a driving rhythm pushing along a stirring melody - super! A bit of a beauty and the beast package then, although if you favour MOR material you could find both CDs to your liking.

#17/18/19
Pipeline 15 [1992] 55-56

THE VENTURES "CHAMELEON" CD
 (East World TOCT6377, Japan)
 Gold Finger; Theme From "No Smoking"; Mushuku; Surfin' USSR; Washington Square; Octopus Tree; Stiketo Flamingo; Mecca; At The Swimming Pool; Salty Dog; Ginza Ska; Pike.

THE VENTURES "60's POPS" CD
 (East World TOCT6379, Japan)
 Whittier Boulevard; Johnny Angel; Rhythm Of The Rain; Black Sand Beach; Lipstick On Your Collar; Hey Paula; Comin' Home; Save The Last Dance For Me; Runaway; Penetration; It's My Party; One Way Ticket.

THE VENTURES "TOKYO CALLIN'" CD
 (East World TOCT6378, Japan)
 Yozora No Hoshi; Yuhi Wa Akaku; Shroi Suna No Shoji; Uruwashiki Otome Tachi; Aoi Hoshikuzu; Kimi To Itsumademo; Blue Eyes; Chisana Snack; Blue Chateau; Emerald No Densetsu; Sylvie My Love; Omoide No Nagisa.

These are the digital versions of three LPs released by East World in the early eighties. "Chameleon" was greeted with some euphoria at the time mainly, I suspect, because it was the first half-decent album that The Ventures had come up with in a decade or so. It is usually referred to as their "new wave" LP, although I doubt that Johnny Rotten would see it quite like that. In reality the only new wave-ish influence on show is that of The Police, which translates as plenty of limp reggae as on "Washington Square" and "Salty Dog". The blunt truth is that The Police had found in Stewart Copeland the best rock drummer since Keith Moon, and it was his power plus performances that gave the fusion of reggae and rock its success. By contrast Mel Taylor merely plods where Copeland had thundered, and regrettably Taylor's pedestrian drumming is a minus factor on all three CDs. Pity really, as the guitar sound is sharp and punchy and The Ventures were at least trying hard. "No Smoking" is much better because it relies on the trusty old "Pipeline" beat, and boasts a reasonable - if not memorable - tune. Much the same could be said of "Mushuku", and "Ginza Ska" fares a little better because of its upped tempo (it's actually a re-cut of "Ginza Lights" of course). The star track is unquestionably "Pike". A solid as granite beat, a spy-like guitar lead that could have been lifted from the "secret agent" ("Batman") LP, and with the keyboards adding a sense of drama and danger to make it a real standout. The following years "60s Pops" was a complete shot in the arm. Although they had previously tackled five of the numbers in the sixties, these were recorded before re-cuts had become something of a way of life for the band and consequently they closely rival the originals. With "Whittier Boulevard" they even eclipse their mark one version, with Edwards soloing just as passionately as he had done on "Ventures A Go Go" and driving straight through Wilson's brittle, stringy rhythm like a man inspired. The selection of other numbers was equally impressive - the cream of the early sixties pops. Stuff like "Johnny Angel", "It's My Party" and "Lipstick On Your Collar" with their teenage angst may seem a little trite to some, but shorn of their adolescent lyrics they are damn fine melodies and make perfect vehicles for The Ventures' guitars. Likewise The Cascades' "Rhythm Of The Rain", Neil Sedaka's "One Way Ticket", and The Drifters' "Save The Last Dance For Me" work superbly as instrumentals because they are such good compositions. For me "60s Pops" is the band's best album since their glory days of the sixties. Wonderful. "Tokyo Calling" was recorded soon after but it failed to capture the same spark that had made "60s Pops" such a delight. Like its predecessor it featured re-cuts (6) but none of them came close to the originals. "Yozora No Hoshi" for example is just a pale imitation of its glorious forerunner. However, having said that, none of them are actually bad and some of the new material is reasonable. "Blue Eyes"

and "Shroi Suna No Shojo" come off particularly well, and there is the occasional flash of brilliance like the twin guitar lead on "Sylvie My Love". Overall though we are talking pleasant and competent, with little leaving a lasting impression. Devotees will need all three CDs I guess but the less committed can make do with "60s Pops" (please note however that all the tracks on "60s Pops" (plus a few more) are collected together on Garland's "Compact Ventures" which is also cheaper).

DB

**#20 Studio Box Sets/ #21 Live Box
Pipeline 16 [1992/3] 34-43**

The greatest instrumental story ever told?

***Dave Burke runs an eye (and a couple of ears) over the prime part of
The Ventures sixties output as contained in 4 de luxe Japanese box sets***

THE VENTURES HISTORY BOX SETS

This is certainly the most sizable, and arguably the most important, slice of rock instrumental yet to make the conversion from vinyl to CD. The full set of re-issues consists of a mind-boggling eight boxes containing something in excess of 800 tracks, and covers virtually the bands entire recorded output from 1960 to 1974. Like it or not, there is no question that the music within forms one of the central pillars upon which the whole instrumental genre rests, and maybe without which, there might not even be a Pipeline for you to be reading now. Quite how the band managed to survive so many radical shifts of style in the most tumultuous and volatile decade ever - commercially outliving their competition and even defying the chronological boundaries of the genre itself - remains a subject for both puzzlement and wonderment. So let's run the microscope over the first half of this mammoth collection to see if you really need to embark on an expenditure that will total a cool £500 for the lot. If music be the food of love, pay on, pay on....

First let us look at the actual execution of the project by Toshiba. The question for anyone faced with the task of a major re-issue programme is how to organise the LPs onto CDs and, more ticklishly, if it all cannot be shoe-horned in then what to leave out? The ideal choice would be to arrange them chronologically with two albums per CD and mopping up the odd non-LP track by including them as bonus cuts, and - applause, applause - that is exactly what Toshiba have done. The bad news is that they have left out "The Ventures Christmas Album" when it was quite capable of being fitted in. What Toshiba should have done is to take advantage of an LPs worth of space on the first of the two live box sets, moving the "On Stage" LP from box volume 3 onto the live box where it would have been more at home. This would have had the twin advantage of making the live box better value, and also meaning that the Christmas LP could have been included along with all the rest of their sixties LPs. If that was too complicated for Toshiba then, looking further up the chain to box number 4 they could (in fact, should) have omitted the "Golden Greats" compilation which is included in its entirety even though only one track on the LP was new ("Rebel Rouser"). On bonus cuts Toshiba have done a reasonable, if flawed, job. While most rarities are here, "Tarantella", "Adventures In Paradise", "Cookies & Coke", and "The Real McCoy" are not. Far more serious is the apparently scant attention given to sound quality. Whilst overall the general standard could be described as good, with a prestige project such as this I would have expected the ultimate in production values. According to my ears none of these LPs have been re-mastered or re-mixed. Comparing these CDs to my Japanese vinyl revealed that few sonic gains have been made. In other words Toshiba have simply slapped the same tapes onto CD. The result is that the sound quality - in some places - dips to a level that can only be referred to as poor. For example, listen to the drums on "Caravan" (from "Bobby Vee Meets"), confined to a single channel they sound over compressed and distorted, whilst the tape noise from the other "silent" channel intrudes upon the whole. In fact it is Mel Taylor who suffers most from the crude stereo mix, almost inevitably locked into one channel and very often sounding somewhat distant. Comparing a few of these

tracks to their counterparts on the recently released "Legendary Masters" CD made the difference clear. In the middle section of "Pedal Pusher" where the band cuts to leave just Taylor supporting the organ line, the re-mixed version has his drums spread across both channels as the dominant, powering factor, but on the box version he is limited to one channel and consequently the track loses a lot of its thrust. Re-mastering has also lent improved clarity and better definition to the "Legendary Masters" versions. However, let us keep this in perspective, without the enhanced versions for comparison the sound quality in most cases would stand as pretty good. It is just not the state-of-the-art production that I had hoped for. One area, at least, where Toshiba score full marks is with presentation. Each box comes with two booklets - one with lengthy notes in Japanese (sod it!), and another containing miniature full colour representations of the original LP sleeves. Particularly creditworthy is that where an LP was re-issued later with a different title and cover, then both are shown. Now to the music itself. I have awarded two scores out of ten to each LP, the first refers to its musical value (M), and the second to its sound quality (Q).

HISTORY BOX VOLUME ONE

Disc 1 - WALK - DON'T RUN & THE VENTURES

Morgen;Raunchy;Home;My Own True Love;The Switch;Walk - Don't Run; Night Train;No Tresspassing;Caravan;Sleep Walk;TheMcCoy;Honky Tonk/ The Shuck;Detour;Ram-Bunk-Shush;Hawaiian War Chant;Perfidia;Harlem Nocturne;Blue Tango;Ups & Downs;Lonesome Town;Torquay;Wailin'; Moon Of Manakoora/BONUS - Walk - Don't Run (stereo version).

The appeal of The Ventures early records is apparent from the word go - Bob Bogle's plentiful use of delicately stroked chords to embellish single note melodies; the close understanding and finely meshed rhythmic interplay between Bogle and Don Wilson; Howie Johnson's clattering single stroke rolls sharply accentuated with fiercely struck rimshots; Nokie Edwards' fluid bass forever threatening to well up and overtake the rest of the band - together they complemented each other perfectly. 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. (M - 7 ** Q - 7)

The second album presents a sharper, cleaner sound, with the warmth of those Fenders coming through loud and clear. Already the band are beginning to sound more accomplished, especially on the ballads like "Moon Of Manakoora" and "Lonesome Town" which feature a heavenly voiced choir in support. There is no shortage of rockers either, with the racing "Wailin'", the rhythmically enriched "Ups & Downs", and the exotic tom-tom led "Hawaiian War Chant". And of course there is "Perfidia" - a perfectly blended arrangement with every ingredient supporting and counter-balancing the other, it is symmetry in music. (M - 8 ** Q - 7)

Disc 2 - ANOTHER SMASH & THE COLOURFUL VENTURES

Riders In The Sky;Wheels;Lonely Heart;Bulldog;Lullaby Of The Leaves; Beyond The Reef;Raw-Hide;Meet Mr Callaghan;Trambone;Last Date;Ginchy; Josie/Blue Moon;Yellow Jacket;Bluer Than Blue;Cherry Pink & Apple Blossom White;Green Leaves Of Summer;Blue Skies;Greenfields;Red Top; White Silver Sands;Yellow Bird;Orange Fire;Silver City/BONUS - Lady Of Spain;Genesis.

By their third LP - "Another Smash" - The Ventures are getting ambitious and adding strings here and there, most likely arranged by Hank Levine. To my mind they don't add much, but then they don't detract much either. They have not yet quite got to the point where, almost automatically, they improve upon their rivals' hits and so "Riders In The Sky", "Wheels" and "Bulldog" come off as good as rather than better than. The exception is "Raw-hide" where they clean up Link Wray's tour de force without losing any of the fire and excitement of the original. "Lullaby Of The Leaves" is another pointer. There is Bob sticking in all these grand sounding chords and whammying them to kingdom come. The arrangement is so, so smart with one exhilarating section racing through to another making it difficult to keep pace with it all. Like The Shadows' "Apache", it was such a different structure and approach from the norm that it stood out above all the rest. (M - 7 ** Q - 7)

Soundwise "The Colourful Ventures" is a little suspect in places. "Bluer Than Blue" suffers from slight muffling and the occasional phasing effect, whilst the powerful drive of "Red Top" is somewhat lessened by its crude stereo separation (oh, for a mono button on my amp!). Hank Levine supplies the odd orchestral touch throughout this thematic collection, although the only place he really contributes positively to the overall performance is on "Silver City", where French horns and strings unite to help create a charming western vignette. Two notable originals here - the surging "Yellow Jacket" and the similarly structured Nokie composition "Orange Fire" - both superb efforts. The excellent arrangements given to standards like "Blue Skies" and "Blue Moon" does full justice to these perennial favourites. (M - 8 ** Q - 6)

Disc 3 - TWIST WITH THE VENTURES & TWIST PARTY VOLUME 2

Driving Guitars;The Twist;Road Runner;Gringo;Moon Dawg;Guitar Twist;Opus Twist;Movin'n'Groovin';Sunny River;Let's Twist Again;Shanghaied;Bumble Bee Twist/My Bonnie Lies;Twisted;The Twomp;Besame Mucho;Blue Tail Fly;Swanee River;Instant Guitars;Dark Eyes;Counterpoint;Kicking Around;Bluebird;Red Wing/BONUS - Lucille (45 version).

"Twist With The Ventures" marks the beginning of The Ventures dance albums. The truth is though that the twist was nothing more than a convenient hook upon which to hang some of the most vibrant RI ever laid down. "Driving Guitars" kicks off the set with an aggressive urgency that is largely maintained throughout. Even "The Twist" is attacked with venom, and already formidable originals like The Wailers' "Road Runner" and "Shanghaied", and The Gamblers' "Moon Dawg" are comfortably improved upon. There is something primitive and earthy about this album - it is just so full of life and, well, the twist never sounded better, that's for sure. (M - 10 ** Q - 8)

If its sequel did not have quite the same stab it did, nevertheless, have its moments. Don Wilson's maverick vocal "The Twomp" was one of the best with his rhythm guitar forcing the track along, although Edwards' lead break and Taylor's around the kit roll was not much less inspiring. "Blue Tail Fly", judging by the sound, was probably the last appearance of Howie Johnson in the drum seat, and his crisp rimshots make it another standout. Also notable is the bands burgeoning talent as writers, with nearly half of the set being composed within the group - "Counterpoint" and "Instant Guitars" being especially enjoyable. The extra track "Lucille" has an added female chorus on the 45 release. (M - 7 ** Q - 7)

Disc 4 - MASHED POTATOES AND GRAVY & GOING TO VENTURES DANCE PARTY

Lucille;Gravy;Hernando's Hideaway;Mashed Potatoe Time;Summertime;Hot Summer;Poison Ivy;The Wah-Watusi;Instant Mashed;Scratch;Hully

Gully;Spudnik/Mr Moto;Theme From Come September;Ya Ya Wobble;Night Drive;Venus;The Intruder;Gandy Dancer;Sweet and Lovely;Limbo Rock; Lolita Ya Ya;Loco-Motion;Gully-ver/BONUS - 2,000lb Bee Parts 1 & 2.

"Mashed Potatoes" was the first of The Ventures' albums to leave me a tad disappointed. Mainly, I think, because everything seems to be taken at a similar strolling tempo, and also too many key tunes - Gravy, Mashed Potato Time, Hully Gully, The Wah-Watusi - do not transfer particularly well to instrumentals. However, in this new setting it does seem considerably improved. Whilst it still lacks knockout uptempo cuts, it is the best sounding LP so far (solid bass and clear drums), and it does have consolations in the shape of Nokie Edwards' twin high class efforts "Spudnik" and "Scratch", Leiber and Stoller's "Poison Ivy", and group composition "Instant Mashed". (M - 6 ** Q - 9)

If "Mashed" was a little lacking in light and shade and bereft of aces, then "Going To The Ventures' Dance Party" certainly made up for it. Right from the opening Mr Moto - a splendid version of The Belairs' classic - there are delights galore, with only the odd disappointment ("Loco-Motion" and "Limbo Rock") to detract. There are quirky beat items like "Ya Ya Wobble", a charming "Venus" gently adorned with a delicate variation of the WDR rhythm, the sinister duo of "The Intruder" and "Gully-ver", the warmly evocative "Lolita Ya Ya", and absolute killers like "Gandy Dancer" and the stunningly dramatic "Night Drive". And to finish on a high note there is also that double-sided fuzz extravaganza "The 2,000lb Bee". Phew! (M - 9 ** Q - 8)

HISTORY BOX VOLUME TWO

Disc 1 - THE VENTURES PLAY TELSTAR AND OTHERS & SURFING

Telstar;The Lonely Bull;Mexico;Calcutta;Apache;Never On Sunday; Tequila;Green Onions;Percolator;Red River Rock;Let There Be Drums; Last Night/Pipeline;Diamonds;Windy and Warm;Ten Over;Surf Rider; Changing Tides;The Ninth Wave;Party In Laguna;Barefoot Venture; The Heavies;Cruncher;The Lonely Sea/ BONUS - Candy Apple Racer; Kickstand (45 version);Kickstand (EP version);Damaged Goods.

The "Telstar" LP was The Ventures weakest LP of the early sixties. No originals, very little R&R guitar and, of course, it was their most commercially successful LP ever! Basically someone had discovered the concept of "title strength", and so only the biggest hits were tackled regardless of how unsuitable some of them were for the band. Only a crazy fool would take on Sandy Nelson's "Let There Be Drums" and here we have Mel trying bravely but on a loser all the way. The Ventures as Johnny & The Hurricanes or Booker T & The MGs? No way! Not even John Wayne could have saved "Red River Rock", and although "Green Onions" fares a little better it is not enough to match the cool chill of those Memphis boys. The presence of acoustic guitar on "Mexico" and mandolin on "Never On Sunday" lends a vaguely pre-mature MOR feel to things, and the best tracks are the albums bookends. "Telstar" is captured very well, and The Markeys' "Last Night" is a surprise success, mainly because The Ventures added some little touches of their own to the arrangement which worked a treat. (M - 5 ** Q - 8)

Their "Surfing" LP could hardly have been more different to its predecessor, with only two big hits and no less than nine originals. Very surprisingly the groups version of "Pipeline" was barely adequate, and their "Diamonds" - compared to Jet & Tony's - was more like cut glass. Still, the originals saved the day, mostly centred around riffs and arrangements rather than full blown melodies, cuts

like "Ten Over" and "Barefoot Venture" are starkly uncompromising in their use of fuzz guitar, weird effects, and a heavy line in lead guitar. "Spudnik" makes a welcome return from the "Mashed Potatoe" set as a result of its appropriation by numerous surf bands and is re-christened as "Surf Rider". There are also two mournful but beautiful ballads in the shape of "The Lonely Sea" and "Changing Tides". Extra tracks include the very rare and not all that special "Candy Apple Racer", and the not so rare but very much more special "Damaged Goods". (M - 8 ** Q - 8)

Disc 2 - BOBBY VEE MEETS THE VENTURES & PLAY THE COUNTRY CLASSICS

Goodnight Irene (V); Walk Right Back (V); Linda Lou (V); Caravan; What Else Is New (V); Candy Man (V); This Is Where Friendship Ends (V); Honeycomb (V); Pretty Girls Everywhere (V); Wild Night; I'm Gonna Sit Right Down And Write Myself A Letter (V); If I'm Right Or Wrong (V)/ Panhandle Rag; Wabash Cannonball; San Antonio Rose; I Walk The Line; Wildwood Flower; I Can't Stop Loving You; Lovesick Blues; Steel Guitar Rag; You Are My Sunshine; Oh, Lonesome Me; Sugarfoot Rag; Born To Lose/ BONUS - El Cumbanchero; Skip To M'Limbo.

Okay, if The Ventures were going to recruit a vocalist how many of you would have suggested Bobby Vee? Hmmm, that's what I thought. Nothing wrong with Bobby of course - he made lots of fine pop 45s - but it's the difference between a mild chicken korma and a throat searing vindaloo! However, Vee does do a fairly respectable job and tracks like "Pretty Girls Everywhere" and "Right Or Wrong" pass muster with ease. The two Ventures solo efforts are "Wild Night" (actually a re-titled "Party In Laguna" from the "Surfing" album), and the new arrangement of "Caravan" which would serve them so well down the years as a grand finale. Unfortunately it is more or less ruined by the badly recorded drums which sound as if Mel was in another studio a couple of blocks away. (M - 6 ** Q - 6)

Almost as strange was The Ventures donning buckskins and Davey Crockett hats to tackle a bunch of country and western chestnuts. Again, the result was not as bad as you might have imagined. In fact cuts like "San Antonio Rose", "Wildwood Flower", "Steel Guitar Rag" and "Sugarfoot Rag" respond to The Ventures big rocking guitars with positive gusto. Who would have thought it? C&W never sounded this good before (hasn't done since either, come to think about it!). (M - 7 ** Q - 7)

Disc 3 - LET'S GO & IN SPACE

Memphis; Let's Go; More; El Watusi; Walk Right In (V); Sukiyaki; New Orleans; So Fine (V); Wipe Out; Hot Pastrami; Runaway; Over The Mountain And Across The Sea/ Out Of Limits; He Never Came Back; Moon Child; Fear; Exploration In Terror; War Of The Sattellites; The Bat; Penetration; Love Goddess Of Venus; Solar Race; The Fourth Dimension; The Twilight Zone/ BONUS - The Savage; The Chase.

"Let's Go" saw the band returning to the safety zone, relying on recent hits for its impact. An even and moderate album, its appeal lies in its alround listenability rather than on any particularly notable tracks. Well, maybe there is one - "New Orleans" - with Taylor's pounding drums dominating the call and response guitars. In a more relaxed vein we have "Sukiyaki" and "Over The Mountain And Across The Sea", both of which are extremely appealing ballads. (M - 7 ** Q - 7)

"In Space" was unquestionably a landmark album for the band. Not only was it easily their most challenging and adventurous outing so far, but more importantly, it put them right at the cutting edge of rock generally. Highly influential, its arsenal of unusual, extra-terrestrial sounds and unworldly effects garnered much critical respect for them. Tracks like "He Never Came Back", "Exploration In

Terror", and "War Of The Satellites" were devastatigly imaginative, while "Love Goddess Of Venus" was achingly beautiful, and "The Bat", with its wailing sirens and relentless riff, was so radical as to be almost avant-garde. Even their versions of others hits were outstanding - The Marketts' "Out Of Limits" was ruthlessly punked up with acid lead guitar, and "Penetration" given a gigantic, lumbering beat and a whining lead that manifestly knocked spots off The Pyramids original. Brilliant from start to finish. (M - 10 ** Q - 8)

Disc 4 - THE FABULOUS VENTURES & WALK DON'T RUN VOLUME 2

Needles And Pins;Runnin' Wild;Eleventh Hour;The Cruel Sea;Scratchin'; Tall Cool One;Only The Young;Fugitive;Ravin' Blue;Walkin' With Pluto; Pink Panther Theme/House Of The Rising Sun;Diamond Head;Night Train; Peach Fuzz;Rap City;Blue Star;Walk Don't Run '64;Night Walk;One Mint Julep;Pedal Pusher;The Creeper;Stranger On The Shore/BONUS - Comin' Home Baby;Blue Star (45 version).

Following their "In Space" triumph was a fairly impossible task, and while "Fabulous" does not quite scale the same stratospheric heights, it is still a thoroughly enjoyable piece of work nevertheless. The best things here were arrived at due to The Ventures absorption of the surf sound which they then assimilated into their own style. Hence "Runnin' Wild", in part, is cleverly constructed around a deviation of the "Pipeline" pulse, and "Journey To The Stars" borrows Dick Dale's gung-ho lead style wholesale. In truth this sounds like a bits and pieces collection - "Eleventh Hour" seems like an "In Space" out-take, and "Needles and Pins" was really a doctored backing track! Still, there are great versions of The Wailers' "Tall Cool One" and our own Dakotas' "The Cruel Sea" as further plus factors. (M - 8 ** Q - 7)

The Ventures celebrated their return to the singles chart by producing an excellent LP to match it. Again they were drawing dividends from their harnessing of the surf sound - "Walk Don't Run '64" itself of course, and "Diamond Head" and also "Rap City" featured relatively complex arrangements and multi-layered guitar parts - mostly inspired by the surfers. But there were so many wonderful sounds here. Steel guitar courtesy of Red Rhodes on the hauntingly beautiful "Blue Star" and "Stranger On The Shore". Enormous fuzz on that Sherman tank of an instrumental - "The Creeper" - and likewise on the rhythmically driven "Peach Fuzz". And not to mention the addition of an unnamed organist (Sandy Lee?) who effectively contributed to many tracks, especially the super "Pedal Pusher". (M - 10 ** Q - 7)

HISTORY BOX - VOLUME THREE

Disc 1 - KNOCK ME OUT! & THE VENTURES ON STAGE

I Feel Fine;Love Potion Number 9;Tomorrow's Love;Oh, Pretty Woman; Mariner No. 4;When You Walk In The Room;Gone, Gone, Gone;Slaughter On Tenth Avenue;She's Not There;Lonely Girl;Bird Rockers;Sha La La/ Wipe Out;Journey To The Stars;Slaughter On Tenth Avenue;Caravan; Pedal Pusher;Apache '65;Bumble Bee;Driving Guitars;Medley - Walk Don't Run-Pefidia-Lullaby Of The Leaves;Yellow Jacket/BONUS - Feel So Fine (V);Angel (V).

This was intended as a nod to the British invasion, although as most of the Brit hits had their origins in the States the effect was rather reduced. Only The Beatles' "I Feel Fine" and Rod Argent's "She's Not There" were truly homegrown items, and both made the journey well. The originals came off pretty good too - the Telstar-ish "Mariner No. 4", the cute and very enchanting "Tomorrows Love", and the hectic "Bird Rockers" - all score highly. This was the Mosrite sound in full flood. with lashings of fuzz for good measure, and the combination made for yet another pleasing LP. (M - 7 ** Q - 7)

There does not seem much point in going into a long dissection about live albums here with a full live box to look at later on. Suffice to say that this is well up to the standard of the other live box recordings, and why isn't this there instead of here? I should also add that the music rating has been downgraded by one point because of the phoney screaming dubbed onto side 2 of the original LP. (M - 7 ** Q - 8)

Disc 2 - THE VENTURES A GO-GO & WHERE THE ACTION IS

Satisfaction;Go Go Slow;Louie Louie;Night Stick;La Bamba;The In Crowd; Woolly Bully;A Go-Go Guitar;A Go-Go Dancer;The Swingin' Creeper; Whittier Boulevard;I Like It Like That/Action;Lies;Fever;Stop Action; 3's A Crowd;A Taste Of Honey;No Matter What Shape;Action Plus;Hang On Sloopy;Nitty;Little Bit Of Action;She's Just My Style/BONUS - Ten Seconds To Heaven;Gemini.

Any album that includes four of the greatest all time riffs - Louie Louie, La Bamba, Woolly Bully, and Satisfaction - and does each and every one proud has a hell of a lot going for it. Not only that, but when it also includes originals of a comparable standard, then we are talking mighty good stuff indeed. "The Swingin' Creeper" is a fascinating piece - jazzy snare and organ meets sinister fuzz and wailing lead - what a dazzling concoction! Add to that the adrenalin rush of "Go Go Dancer" and "Night Stick", the Chuck Berry-ish "Go Go Guitar" and the thumping "Go Go Slow" (and, hey, isn't that really "Leader Of The Pack"?), and we have an album that goes all the way! The organist, too, should be applauded for fitting so snugly. (M - 10 ** Q - 9)

The way to follow one great album is with another great album. And so they did. Skimming off the cream of the mid-sixties US hits once again and re-inventing them as sharp, aggressive instrumentals was only half the trick. The other half was coming up with originals like "Stop Action" - a stunning slab of instro meltdown - and "Action Plus" - a whirling blend of high octane guitar and trilling organ - whammo! And do you notice how so many Ventures versions from this period are far better than the original hits? Bonus tracks are "Stranger In Paradise" variously known as "The Stranger" and "Ten Seconds To Heaven", which they could accurately have titled 1 minutes and 53 seconds in heaven, and "Gemini" - another stab at the "Telstar" idea which even Joe Meek would have been happy with. (M - 10 ** Q - 9)

Disc 3 - BATMAN THEME & GO WITH THE VENTURES

Batman Theme;Zocko!;Joker's Wild;The Cape;007-11;The Man From Uncle; Secret Agent Man;Hot Line;Vampcamp;Up, Up And Away;Get Smart Theme; Green Hornet '66/Green Grass;Ginza Lights;These Boots Are Made For Walking;Frankie And Johnny;Ad-Venture;Monday, Monday;Good Lovin'; Eight Miles High;Escape;Sloop John B;Go;California Dreamin'/ BONUS - Green Hornet Theme.

By this time The Ventures were on a roll, and it began to seem as if everything that they did would turn to gold. This album, reportedly written and recorded within a week, proved that to be the case conclusively. The astonishing thing was that they could extract so much from the simplest of ideas. "The Cape", for example, is just a mesh of odd sounds and assorted hooks woven together, and yet the whole makes for another spellbinding adventure in sound. And, talking of sound, I am sad to report that two or three tracks suffer from the occasional drop-out and so I have marked it down accordingly. (M - 9 ** Q - 6)

Understandably The Ventures could not maintain this supreme standard forever, and so "Go With" dipped just a little because of the odd duff inclusion. Their best friends should have told them that "These Boots Are Made For Walking" barely limped along, and "Frankie And Johnny", with its femme chorus and "You've Really Got Me" riff was a bit of a mis-match. However, compensations galore were on hand in the shape of their own superb "Ginza Lights", a stirring rock-up of The Olympics/Rascals' "Good Lovin'", an eerie spaced-out "Eight Miles High" (were not The Ventures the first space band after all?), Danny Hamilton's exciting Pipeline-ish "Escape", and the forceful yet poignant treatment of John Phillips' "California Dreaming". (So much better without the words!). (M - 8 ** Q - 8)

Disc 4 - WILD THINGS & GUITAR FREAKOUT

Wild Thing;Fuzzy And Wild;Sweet Pea;Wild And Wooly;Wild Child;Summer In The City;The Pied Piper;Wild Trip;Hanky Panky;Wildcat;How Now Wild Cow;The Work Song/Good Thing;High And Dry;Standing In The Shadows Of Love;Off In The 93rds;Cookout Freakout On Lookout Mountain;Wack Wack; Mod East;I'm A Believer;Guitar Freakout;Snoopy Vs The Red Baron; Paper Airplane;Theme From The Wild Angels/BONUS - Arabesque; Dick Tracy.

The first heavy metal LP? Certainly The Ventures had never sounded harder or tougher. Lashings of buzzing fuzz, rock solid beats, and fiery soloing a plenty. Even the light confection of Tommy Roe's "Sweet Pea" was given such a thumping Mel Taylor beat that it would have scared the shit out of The Wonder Stuff and Vic Reeves! I mean listen to "Wild Child" for a king-size heavy duty rhythm, or to "Fuzzy And Wild" for the fuzziest fuzz guitar ever! Wild indeed. (M - 8 ** Q - 8)

I remember reading a review in Melody Maker of "Guitar Freakout" where the, oh so desperate to be hip journalist, poured scorn on this album, but reluctantly admitted that he could not dismiss it altogether because there were good things on it. His confusion was understandable as The Ventures had mixed the crass with the sublime. Hence we get the unforgivably awful "Snoopy" and the nearly as bad "Wild Angels", nestling alongside genuine gems like "High And Dry" with its intoxicating bass run, "Off In The 93rds" with its hypnotic Bo Diddley derived rhythm, and "Mod East" - as snappy and unashamedly cute a meeting of East and West that could be found - all kaftans and peanut butter! (M - 8 ** Q - 8)

THE VENTURES LIVE BOX

Disc 1 - THE VENTURES IN JAPAN

Medley: Walk Don't Run-Perfidia-Lullaby Of The Leaves;Driving Guitars; Bulldog;Pipeline;Apache;Slaughter On Tenth Avenue;Walk Don't Run '64; Bumble Bee Twist;Wipe Out;Caravan.

What a pity that The Ventures live recordings did not get a wider hearing in the West. Back in the sixties The Rolling Stones were the bad boys of R&R, and The Who the destructive yobs, and yet neither could deliver the pure musical aggression that The Ventures manifested on these live recordings. "Bulldog", "Driving Guitars", "Wipe Out", and "Pipeline" are all played as though their lives depended on it. The Japanese prove to be the worlds politest audience keeping their applause largely to the gaps between numbers, and the sound is crystal clear with each musicians performance being clearly discernible. The only minus point occurs on this, the first CD of the box, as only one LP is featured (35minutes) making it a little short on value. (M - 9 ** Q - 9)

Disc 2 - ALL ABOUT THE VENTURES

The Cruel Sea;Penetration;Bulldog;I Feel Fine;House Of The Rising Sun; Out Of Limits;Slaughter On Tenth Avenue;Beasme Mucho Twist;Love Potion No. 9;Journey To The Stars;When You Walk In The Room;Walk Don't Run 64; Rap City;Wipe Out;Medley: Walk Don't Run-Perfidia-Lullaby Of The Leaves;The Lonely Bull;Telstar;Mariner No. 4;Driving Guitars;Apache; Yellow Jacket;Pipeline;Surf Rider;Bumble Bee Twist;Diamond Head; Caravan/BONUS - The Pink Panther Theme.

Anyone wondering why "In Japan Volume 2" is not included in this box set need wonder no longer. For some time I have thought that it was in fact an edited down version of the "All About The Ventures" double set, and I believe this now stands confirmed by its absence here. All you need to know about "All About" is that it is another of the bands great live recordings. From the opening shout of "1,2 - 1,2,3!" that ignites The Cruel Sea we are off on a voyage of torrid, swirling guitars in a tidal wave of energy. Everything here is taken at a furious pace and The Ventures simply knock out one after another of RI's greatest classics as though it was the easiest thing in the world. Still better is the chance to hear less familiar tracks like "Besame Mucho" and "Love Potion No. 9" transformed from their rather more sedate studio versions into live boiling cauldrons of molten guitar. The strangest thing is hearing Don Wilson's soft-spoken mild-mannered introductions between numbers - he sounds so polite and restrained, and yet their guitars are dripping blood! (M - 9 ** Q - 9)

Disc 3 - ENCORE! & LIVE AGAIN!

La Bamba;A Taste Of Honey;Secret Agent Man;California Dreaming;Batman Theme;The Man From Uncle;Ginza Lights;Kimi-To-Itsumademo;Yozora-No-Hoshi;007-11;Wipe Out '66/Blue Chateau;Hokkaido Skies (V);Black Sand Beach;A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You;Wooly Bully;Ginza Lights; Sentimental Guitar;La Bamba;California Dreaming;A Taste Of Honey; Slow Sundown;Diamond Head '67/BONUS - La Bamba (45 version).

Of all their live LPs "Encore" is my favourite. It retains the high energy levels of previous live recordings but adds an extra smidgeon of polish which has the effect of making the sound a little warmer. A less familiar track listing is much in evidence - "La Bamba", "California Dreaming", "Man From Uncle", "Secret Agent Man" - they are all given splendid treatments, and this makes the collection a successive discovery of delights. And we also have the first out and out ballad to be included on their live recordings - "Kimi-To-Itsumademo" - a beautiful melody sensitively handled, but before you have time to draw breath we are back to the hectic rockers with the bustling "Yozora-No-Hoshi". Superb stuff from start to finish. (M - 10 ** Q - 10)

If "Live Again" starts a little uncomfortably with the moderate "Blue Chateau" and a Japanese vocalist featuring "Hokkaido Skies", we are soon back on the right track the moment we hit "Black Sand Beach". A glorious cornucopia of wonderful sounds and driving rhythms it is surely one of The Ventures very best. From then on the band can do no wrong as they tackle high pedigree material such as "Little Bit Me", "Wooly Bully" and "Slow Sundown". True, there are four cuts repeated from the "Encore" set, but they are so good that it really does not matter a fig (or any other kind of fruit you care to select!) (M - 9 ** Q - 9)

Disc 4 - IN TOKYO '68 & LIVE!

Let's Go;Telstar;A Taste Of Honey;Ballad Of Bonnie & Clyde;Ode To Billy Joe (V);Pipeline;Wipe Out '68;House Of The Rising Sun;Apache; Yesterday & Flint Hill;Born Free (V);Walk Don't Run;Caravan '68/ Kyoto Doll;Aquarius-Let The Sun Shine In;Light My Fire;Classical Gas; Medley: Who'll Stop The Rain-Bad Moon Rising;Paint It Black;Born To

Be Wild; Medley: Blowin' In The Wind-Don't Think Twice It's Alright;
 Kyoto Doll (V); Proud Mary; House Of The Rising Sun; Honky Tonk Women;
 Hawaii Five-0.

Between "Live Again" and "Tokyo '68" just about everything changed. Nokie is gone! Instead we have Gerry McGee on lead and Sandy Lee on organ. Not only is the sound considerably different but it seems as if the engineers are busy playing cards in a back room somewhere. For also gone are the crystal clear sound and perfectly balanced instrumentation. Instead Mel seems to have been recorded in an empty aircraft hanger, Don's rhythm guitar sometimes sounds distorted, McGee is mixed too far back and the organ too far forward. McGee is losing no time in making his influence felt, with the inclusion of the swampy "Ode To Billy Joe" (vocal by Sandy Lee), and a country dust-up on "Flint Hill". Don Wilson also contributes to the feeling of a move away from the old style with a cheesy, hammed-up vocal on John Barry's MOR hymn "Born Free". Times they are a changing.
 (M - 6 ** Q - 6)

"Live!" has the same McGee led line-up but with John Durrill replacing Sandy Lee on keyboards. Thankfully this is a far better mixed recording and the result is a far more integrated sounding band. By now McGee has stamped his authority on the band, and his swampy Louisiana finger picking style dominates, especially with no less than three Creedence Clearwater Revival tunes from the bayou included. There also continues to be hints of the group's later shift towards a more MOR style with the presence of "Aquarius", "Classical Gas", and a medley of two of Dylan's more mellow tunes. There is consolation for us unrepentant rockers in the shape of a six minute run through of The Doors' "Light My Fire" (could smell the dope on this one!), and Steppenwolf's immortal anthem for biker rebels everywhere - "Born To Be Wild". Tune in, turn on - and drop out! Sorry, got carried away there just for a moment. (M - 7 ** Q - 7)

<u>SUMMARY</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Period</u>	<u>Music total</u>	<u>Sound quality</u>	<u>Maximum possible</u>
Box 1	Toshiba TOCP 7129-32	1960-1962	62	59	80
Box 2	Toshiba TOCP 7121-24	1963-1964	61	58	80
Box 3	Toshiba TOCP 7133-36	1965-1967	67	63	80
Live Box	Toshiba TOCP 7125-28	1965-1970	50	50	60

This is a feast of wonderful music. Those with a taste for straight, unadulterated, clean and pure guitar instrumentals will undoubtedly prefer box number one. For me The Ventures purple patch came later and stretches right from the "In Space" album (latter part of box two) up to "Guitar Freakout" at the end of box three. During this period The Ventures were at their most inventive. Recruiting, no, let us be honest - stealing - ideas from everyone and everywhere, especially the surf scene, they created a hybrid that was distinctly Ventures and dressed it up in arrangements that were as clever as they were imaginative. This makes boxes two and three damn nigh essential as far as I am concerned. The live box is ideal for the bare-chested macho type of instro fan, and not for the lovers of the gentle melodious approach. The set starts off powerfully with the first CD, gathers momentum and pace with the second and third, and falls off with the fourth as the band begins to change its direction at the tail end of the sixties. In fact the only significant minus point with these boxes (the studio ones that is) is their less than perfect sound. However as Toshiba have taken the plunge with the ultimate re-issue package it does seem unlikely that other companies will rush to compete. One thing is for sure, if anyone were bold enough to do so with properly upgraded sound there would be mass suicide amongst Ventures devotees who had already bankrupted themselves to acquire this little lot!

DB

THE VENTURES "SAY YES" CD
(EMI Toshiba TOCP 7154 Japan)

Say Yes;Boku Wa Kono Me De Uso O Tsuku;Hajimari Wa Itsumo Ame;
Taiyo To Hokori No Naka De;Do Ya Do;Love Song;Koibito Wa Wine Iro;
Romancing Yard;Morning Moon;Moon Light Blues.

THE VENTURES "FLYIN' HIGH" CD
(EMI Toshiba TOCP 7239, Japan)

Flashback;After Midnight In Shinjuku;Strawberry Brandy;Cartoon;
Follow Your Heart;Cruisin' Machine;September Sunrise;Two On The Beach;
Snows Of Nagano;Shonan Shores;Memories Of Love.

It seems positively uncharitable to criticise anything as pleasant as this. Each track drifts by like a white, fluffy Californian cloud. It is a seamless parade of warmth and niceness - ballads by the pool, anyone? Of course it is superbly produced - sounds great - and the guys acquit themselves expertly. Only trouble is that the tunes (mainly written by Ryo Asuka) barely scratch surface memory, let alone lodge for keeps. Exception is "Koibito Wa Wine Iro" which has a delicious piano intro, but is somewhat spoilt for taking some of its melody line from Robert Palmer's "Some Guys Have All The Luck". Most of the tracks are ballads (or seem to be), and even when the lads do get a little heavier as on "Romancing Yard" and "Morning Moon", Gerry still manages to sound like he is playing another ballad. Dave Carr sprinkles his synthesiser sweetening over all and sundry adding to the general saccharine saturation. Say yes? Not so likely!

"Flyin' High", whilst similar to "Say Yes" in general tone and character, is the better of the two because of the rather improved tunes. All are written by various combinations of The Ventures, including honorary band member Bob Spalding. In their usual magpie way they have lifted the odd phrase or hook from here or there, and so "Memories Of Love" reminds of the verse to "You Don't Have To Say You Love Me", and "After Midnight In Shinjuku" has a steal from Rare Bird's "Sympathy". Best tracks are "Flashback" - as its title implies a reprise of previous glories complete with glissando slides and throbbing "Pipeline" pulse - "Snows Of Nagano" for its beaty background, and "Cruisin' Machine" for capturing the same kind of sharp, jazzy feel that Larry Carlton specializes in. The down side is again one Dave Carr. There is no doubt that he is expert in what he does, and I can understand what The Ventures see in him. In one economical unit he offers orchestral lushness and a professional high gloss sheen, fleshing out and adorning to order. I merely question whether he should be featured quite so predominantly on every track, because the end result is that everything takes on the same over-sweetened character - all opulence and syrup. To be fair I must add that Ventures fans with a liking for MOR will probably lap both of these CDs up, and I guess that even I would sum them up as "nice" ("Say Yes") and "very nice" ("Flyin' High"). Maybe it is just that I have recently finished reviewing all their sixties stuff in their box sets, and so I cannot but help wish that they still sounded gutsy and gimmicky (in an inventive way) instead of merely mature and accomplished.

DB

#24 Studio Box Sets/ #25 Live Box
[with John Beddington]
Pipeline 17 [1993] 32-41

The Ventures History Boxes - 2

*John Beddington checks out Volume 5 and the second of the live boxes,
whilst Dave Burke gets to grips with Volume 4 and the "Pops" collection.*

HISTORY BOX VOLUME FOUR

Disc 1 - SUPER PSYCHEDELICS & GOLDEN GREATS

Strawberry Fields Forever; Psychedelic Venture; Western Union; Guitar
Psychedelics; Kandy Koncoction; Reflections; A Little Bit Me, A Little
Bit You; Endless Dream; Vibrations; Psyched-Out; 1999 AD; Happy Together/
Telstar; The Lonely Bull; Rebel Rouser; Honky Tonk; Let's Go; Pipeline;
Walk Don't Run '64; Tequila; Apache; Wipe Out; Memphis; Out Of Limits/
BONUS - Theme From Endless Summer; Pandora's Box; Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye

To my mind, "Super Psychedelics" is the last of the truly great Ventures LPs. Displaying the same innovation and inventiveness that had distinguished many of their mid-sixties albums, there was a new sense of maturity and ambition about their performances here. Almost as if they were saying to the new wave of psychedelic bands: "Look, we can do this, only we do it better!" True, as usual, they borrowed ideas from all and sundry - "Guitar Psychedelics" has snatches of "Needles And Pins", "Vibrations" opens like The Electric Prunes' "I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night", but as it is also true, in the case of the latter, that The Ventures initiated many of the basic ingredients that made up the psychedelic sound it seems like merely a compliment returned. Original compositions abound, every one of them tantalizing and irresistible, without even the merest hint of fat or filler anywhere. Sitar, mandolins, harpsichords, Indian flutes, and an arsenal of creative guitar sounds, were all utilized in order to paint a picture as exotic as it was imaginative. To borrow a line from Carlesberg - "probably the best guitar LP in the world".
(M - 10 ** Q - 10) (M = music rating, Q = sound quality, out of 10).

"Golden Greats", the band's first major American retrospective, was a dismal, unimaginative failure. Instead of taking the opportunity to compile a real flag waver showcasing the band's finest moments, Liberty put together this indifferent package which relied solely on the marketing concept of "title strength" to make its impact. To make matters worse they cynically added an unissued track (a poor version of Duane's "Rebel Rouser"), to test the loyalty of some of the most faithful fans anywhere. The presence of the entire LP here is not just superfluous but insulting. By way of consolation there are two excellent bonus cuts in the shape of "Endless Summer" & "Pandora's Box".
(M - 5 ** Q - 6 ** Concept - 0)

Disc 2 - \$1,000,000 DOLLAR WEEKEND & FLIGHTS OF FANTASY

What Now My Love; Georgy Girl; Ode To Billie Joe; Sunny; Respect; To Sir With Love; Music To Watch Girls By; Groovin'; Windy; Sealed With A Kiss; Uptight; Yesterday/Mighty Quinn; Innermotion Faze; Ballad Of Bonnie And Clyde; Walking The Carpet; Flights Of Fantasy; Soul COaxing; Green Light; Cry Like A Baby; Fly Away; Love Shower; Summertime Blues; Scarborough Fair/BONUS - El Greco; On The Road; Summer Love; Too Young To Know My Mind.

Was this the same band that had recorded "Super Psychedelics"? The creative flair that had marked that out as something special was replaced by the same dull competence that was soon to characterise their MOR albums of the seventies. Moments to enjoy were scarce.

"What Now My Love" was treated quite sprightly, and "Georgy Girl" and "Windy" are such jaunty little tunes that it is hard not to warm to them. Most of the rest were pretty lifeless, with Edwards sounding mellow and Taylor restrained, the overall effect suggested a band uncertain about which direction they should pursue.

(M - 5 ** Q - 8)

If "Flights Of Fantasy" was not quite a return to the triumphant form of "Psychedelics", it did at least confirm that it was far too soon write the band off. Despite the inclusion of some dodgy hits ("Cry Like A Baby" and "Bonnie & Clyde") the day was saved by some more fine originals such as "Walking The Carpet", "Fly Away" and "Love Shower" - even if the title track itself was no more than "Psyched Out" borrowed from "Super Psychedelics" with added phasing - cheeky sods! Of the non-originals Raymond Lefevres' "Soul Coaxing" is a gorgeous melody done full justice to, and "Summertime Blues", even though the dynamite arrangement had been stolen lock, stock and barrel from early metal band Blue Cheer, certainly proved that The Ventures still had balls aplenty. The best thing on the whole CD though is one of the four bonus cuts - "El Greco". One of the bands elusive rarities, it is a headlong romp through traditional Spanish musical influences - sort of flamenco goes surfing - all castanets, handclaps, footstamping, cries of "Toré", wrapped up in Don Wilson's swirling rhythm guitar. Bravo!

(M - 8 ** Q - 8)

Disc 3 - THE HORSE & UNDERGROUND FIRE

The Horse; Here Comes The Judge; Licking Stick; Crazy Horse; The Gallop; Grazing In The Grass; Medley: Walk Don't Run - Land of 1,000 Dances; Soul Breeze; Jumpin' Jack Flash; Choo Choo Train; Horse Power; Tip-Toe Through The Tulips/Underground Fire; Embers In E Minor; Sea Of Grass; Higher Than Thou; Up, Up And Down; Country Funk & The Canned Heat; Born To Be Wild; Sunshine Of Your Love; The Weight; Light My Fire; Down On Me; Fire.

Well, suddenly, there is this new geezer, and The Ventures are using brass and getting moderately funky - the difference a lead guitarist can make! Cliff Noble's "The Horse" opens the proceedings in fine style with Taylor's thundering drums and Gerry McGee sticking it to them like a man with something to prove. There are the customary couple of duffers - James Brown's "Licking Stick" never gets off the ground, and "Land Of 1,000 Dances" cannot help but suffer in comparison to Wilson Pickett's "let's-burn-it-to-the-ground-treatment", whilst "Tip Toe Through The Tulips" is just plain unnecessary. Danny Hamilton's "The Gallop" and Hugh Masekela's "Grazing In The Grass" though are super and more than make up for it. Best tune of the lot award goes to Don Wilson for his "Soul Breeze" - a peach of a melody. Of McGee's first outing with the band I reckon most would conclude that the lad dun good. (M - 7 ** Q - 8)

"Underground Fire" was always an album of two distinctly separate halves. Side one carried original compositions with the guys, mainly under the influence of Cream, concentrating on constructing heavy, somewhat plodding riffs, rather at the expense of any clear melodies and maybe losing out a bit because of that. Side two was a much better bet with the band cherry-picking the best of the counter-culture's crop. McGee never sounded more at home than when dealing with the angry call-to-the-road of "Born To Be Wild", the poised splendour of "Light My Fire", the melancholic resignation of "The Weight", and the incendiary explosion of "Fire". Comfortably the best of the bands post-Edwards productions. (M - 8 ** Q - 9)

Disc 4 - HAWAII FIVE-O & SWAMP ROCK

Hawaii Five-O; Lovin' Things; Galveston; The Letter; Don't Give In To Him; Theme From A Summer Place; Medley: Spooky/Traces/Stormy; Medley: Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In; Games People Play; I Can Hear Music; Dizzy/Carry Me Back; Honky Tonk Women; Muddy Mississippi Line; Jambalaya; Swamp Rock; Niki Hoeky; Green River; Suspicious Minds; Catfish Mud Dance; Proud Mary; Gumbo; Plaquemines Parish.

A disappointing set. It is very much The Ventures as part of a big band with virtually every track being drowned in pedestrian brass arrangements. Taylor clearly relishes it and is in punchy form but, apart from McGee, it is difficult to tell if the rest of the group are even there, with Wilson mostly inaudible. "Theme From A Summer Place" works best, largely, I suspect, because the brass players were taking a smoke break and, tell me, how did they manage to reduce a magical song like "I Can Hear Music" to a joyless dirge? The Ventures as James Last? No thanks. (M - 4 ** Q - 7)

That brass is still there on occasion but, thankfully, it is considerably more restrained on "Swamp Rock". Instead we have the odd use of accordion, fiddle, and harmonica, emphasising the rootsy element within the material which, to these ears, is far more acceptable. McGee, of course, is completely at home down in the swamps, and his handling of such as "Jambalaya" and "Niki Hoeky" is text book exemplary. "Catfish Mud Dance" - mainly acoustic sounding and enhanced by spirited piano from Mike Melvoin - and the good-time hoe-down of "Gumbo" also help to brighten up the bayou. A more earthy and better balanced set than "Hawaii Five-O" but, nevertheless, this still falls short of the high standards of their mid-sixties work. (M - 6 ** Q - 7)

HISTORY BOX VOLUME FIVE

Disc 1 - MORE GOLDEN GREATS & OTHERS

The Good, The Bad And The Ugly; Mission Impossible; House Of The Rising Sun; More; Torquay; Love Is Blue; Classical Gas; A Taste Of Honey; Green Onions; Grazing In The Grass; Raunchy; Hawaii Five-O/BONUS - The Mercenary; The Wanderer; Storefront Lawyers; Kern Country Line; Paint It Black; Manchurian Beat; Squaw Man; Last Tango In Paris; Prima Vera; Skylab; Runaway (V); Sally (V); Hey There Sunshine (V); Behind These Stained Glass Windows (V). Last 4 Don Wilson solo efforts in mono.

"More Golden Greats" is almost as much of an insult as "Golden Greats". Only six new tracks with two of those being re-cuts of titles recorded earlier in the sixties. Why is it here in its entirety? Of the new tracks "The Good etc" does not quite match the atmosphere of Morricone, but "Mission Impossible" is effective. "Love Is Blue" is pleasant if unspectacular, and "Classical Gas" surpasses Mason Williams original. "Raunchy" is slightly improved courtesy of a few ideas from "She's About A Mover", and "Torquay" - based around tom-toms, wah-wah guitar and crazy piano playing - is both bizarre and incredible. Could have been a great LP, instead it is a good EP! (M - 6 ** Q - 9)

The rest of the CD contains some rare 45s, some of which were only issued in Japan. "The Mercenary" is more Morricone and is every bit as dramatic as its title suggests - superb. "Storefront Lawyers" is "Five-O" style bombast, and "Kern Country Line" has great stuttering guitar work with gorgeous steel from Red Rhodes on one of the bands best ever originals. "Paint It Black" is more sedate than its live brother, as is "Manchurian Beat", featuring Bob on a rare lead outing together with some weird echo effects. "Squaw Man" was a great reply to Electric Indians' "Keem O Sabe", unusual in that it does not include drums. "Last Tango"/"Prima Vera" was another good coupling. The former is very atmospheric, and "Prima Vera" is an improved version of the "Pops '73" track. "Skylab" was another attempt at the "Telstar" idea which failed, although there is some nifty guitar to admire. The

remainder are Don Wilson solo efforts and so seem a bit out of place here. (M - 7 ** Q - 7)

Disc 2 - 10TH ANNIVERSARY ALBUM

Everybody's Talking; Sweet Caroline; Who'll Stop The Rain/Bad Moon Rising; Michelle; Good Morning Starshine; Bridge Over Troubled Water; Eleanor Rigby; The Sound Of Silence; Strangers In The Night; Those Were The Days; MacArthur Park; Blowin' In The Wind/Don't Think Twice; Up, Up, And Away; By The Time I Get To Phoenix; Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head; Let It Be; Sugar, Sugar; Never My Love; Delilah; Hey Jude; Spinning Wheel.

The Creedence and Dylan medlies are the cream of the crop as they coincide closely with McGee's natural style and feature passages that will surely have you jumping for joy. Next up are The Beatles' compositions, and although I was never a fan, they did write some splendid tunes, with "Eleanor Rigby", "Let It Be" and "Hey Jude" all faring well with sympathetic interpretations. There is no saving the horrendous "Michelle" though! "Sound Of Silence" is really evocative, a difficult song to attempt instrumentally, and "Bridge Over Troubled Water" is adequate, if perhaps a little wooden (the bridge you mean? Ed) It is hard to believe that Jim Webb could write a lovely melody like "By The Time I Get To Phoenix" and then unforgivable drivel like "Up, Up And Away". "Everybody's Talking", "Sweet Caroline" and "Never My Love" would normally be placed in the file marked "garbage", but The Ventures do succeed in making them listenable. The rest are beyond redemption. Why they should record "Those Were The Days", "Raindrops" and "Sugar, Sugar" etc is beyond this reviewer. True, they play them proficiently and The Ventures demonstrate that they could be competent session musicians - but that is no justification for such lightweight inclusions. In short, this MOR epidemic made it an anniversary to mourn rather than celebrate. (M - 5 ** Q - 8)

Disc 3 - NEW TESTAMENT & THEME FROM SHAFT

Good Mornin' Captain; Testament; free; Oye Como Va; Wild World; Katana; Whole Lotta Love; What Is Life; Novios Para Siempre; Spirit; She's A Lady; Pesado/Theme From Shaft; Peace Train; Thundercloud; Gimme Some Lovin'; Indian Sun; Deep, Deep In The Water; Gypsys, Tramps And Thieves; Two Divided By Love; Tight Fit; I'm A Man; Never My Love; Cherries Jubilee.

Difficult to imagine an LP further removed from "10th Anniversary" than "New Testament". MOR it is not, and with 50% originals things are looking up. Not easy to describe the style of this set as it is so individual, but (Carlos) Santana is as good a reference point as any. All the tracks have a basic Latin/South American rock feel. Consequently, "Whole Lotta Love", "What Is Life" and "Free" have a totally re-interpreted sound, boasting revelatory lead guitar, wholly inventive percussion, and superb breezy keyboards (John Durrill at his best). Even covers like "She's A Lady" and "Wild World" score highly with McGee stealing the show on both. Best of all though is "Spirit", based around a funky rhythm guitar riff and a deceptively simple lead motif (cross-picked I believe), they combine to create a powerful, dramatic theme. One of their finest ever songs! One of their finest ever albums! (M - 9 ** Q - 9)

"Shaft" is a surprisingly strong album considering that Gerry McGee departed midway through its recording. Hence, United Artists simply re-titled "Naruto" from "Golden Pops" as "Thundercloud" and "Nagoya Express" as "Tight Fit". Pulled together a few recent singles like the title track - a good version of Issac Hayes' classic - the superb "Indian Sun" and the almost as good "Cherries Jubilee", and, look, The Ventures have a new LP! Of the new tracks "Deep, Deep In The Water" is a curious vocal which was probably recorded after McGee's exit as

it features no lead guitar. "Gypsies, Tramps And Thieves" is not all that special, but "Two Divided By Love" is very melodic. The two Spencer Davis numbers never sounded wilder, with super fuzzed guitar in abundance, and "Peace Train" is played in an incredibly adept fingerstyle fashion with Red Rhodes weeping steel also in attendance. (M - 7 ** Q - 9)

Disc 4 - JOY & ROCK'N'ROLL FOREVER

Beethoven's Sonata In C Sharp Minor; One Fine Day; In A Persian Market; Swan Lake; Bach's Prelude; Peter And The Wolf; Mozart Forty; Joy; Fur Elise; Ravel's Pavane; Mozart's Minuet; Melody Of Joy/Honky Tonk (Parts 1 & 2); Last Night; Smokie; Rumble; You Can't Sit Down; Ram-Bunk-Shush; 20-75; Guitar Boogie Shuffle; Raunchy; Soul Twist; Sleepwalk.

"Joy" was a very bold album from a band still without a recognised lead guitarist. Already in the can were "Joy" itself and "Swan Lake" which had been recorded whilst Gerry McGee was still in residence. Excellent they are too, the former having lightning lead guitar and heavy orchestration and the latter being just plain funky, maaaan! For the rest of the album Bob took over on lead while Mel's brother Larry filled in on bass. Most of the cuts are carried by highly professional keyboard and string arrangements, the best of which can be heard on the playful "Peter And The Wolf", the fittingly eastern sounding "In A Persian Market", and "One Fine Day", especially for its beautiful mandolin part. My problem comes with some of the other selections which are far too sugary for my taste. To be honest I used to really dislike this album, but now I cannot think why, as it is mainly very pleasant. (A sure sign that you are getting older, John!) (M - 6 ** Q - 9)

The band on "R&R Forever" are Harvey Mandel on lead, Larry Taylor on bass, Jackie Kelso on sax, Mel on drums and, presumably, Don and Bob in there someplace. It is not much of a Ventures record really, or a Ventures sound. Five of the eleven titles had been tackled in the early sixties, and all to better effect. To be fair, this was intended to have an R&B feel, and so tracks like "Sleepwalk" and "Raunchy" were never going to be a comfortable fit. The whole set is too sax-heavy for my liking, and Kelso's performance lacks sparkle. Shame, as the guy can really cook. Harvey Mandel is also less than satisfying, he is too laconic, and his style is just not particularly well suited to R&R. Not that it is all bad though, "Honky Tonk", "Rumble", and "Guitar Boogie Shuffle" do work well, even if they do not add too much to the originals. (M - 4 ** Q - 8)

LIVE BOX - VOLUME TWO

Disc 1 - ON STAGE '71

Born To Be Wild; Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In; Classical Gas; Presentation of The Ventures; Pipeline; Reflections In A Palace Lake; Free; Kyoto Doll/ Paint It Black; Light My Fire; Slaughter On Tenth Avenue; Kyoto Doll (V); Kyoto Bojo (V); Wipe Out; Apache; Manchurian Beat; Fire; Walk Don't Run; Diamond Head; Caravan.

If "On Stage '71" had proved to be Gerry McGee's live swansong with The Ventures, then quite frankly, there could not have been a more fitting one. A glance through the listing proves that by now McGee had made the band his own. Skimming through them - "Aquarius" is much improved by the live setting (no horns) and "Classical Gas" will make lesser guitarists suicidal! "Reflections In A Palace Lake" is hauntingly beautiful, and "Kyoto Doll", as it is played on sitar, is coupled with "Paint It Black". The latter is taken at breakneck pace and is of such a high standard that a friend - an ardent Stones fan -

claimed that it slaughtered the original. "Light My Fire" is another highspot, and would have been great if not for the excessive keyboard warbling from John Durrill - the weak link throughout the set. "Manchurian Beat" is a powerful, gutsy version, and much stronger than the studio cut, much the same which could also be said of "Fire". McGee once stated that he did not enjoy performing Ventures standards. You would never guess, as on the whole they never sounded better, with "Diamond Head" and "Slaughter" being superb. It will be no surprise that the set closes with "Caravan", a daunting prospect for the lead guy, but predictably, it is handled with aplomb...the drumming is okay too... (M - 8 ** Q - 9)

Disc 2 - ON STAGE '72

The Cruel Sea;Driving Guitars;I'm A Man;Apache;Diamond Head;Ginza Lights;Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In;Slaughter On Tenth Avenue;Bulldog; Proud Mary;Kyoto Doll/Paint It Black;Wipe Out;Gimme Some Lovin'; House Of The Rising Sun;Love Theme From The Godfather;Honky Tonk; Stranger In Midoosuji (V);Walk Don't Run;Manchurian Beat;Pipeline; Caravan.

During his time with The Ventures, Nokie Edwards became known as the "king of guitars" in Japan. However, in a few short years Gerry McGee also made a lot of friends, and had also changed the band for good. For Edwards a return under those conditions must have been a little difficult. This live set is a testament to the fact that Nokie was more than able to deal with the changes that The Ventures, and music in general, had undergone in the interim. The sound is heavier than on later live sets, and is an interesting and unusual fusion of the hard blues sound with the more refined country picking style with which Nokie is especially adept at. Technology had also moved on, and the use of mild distortion, wah-wah, and even feedback were all handled expertly. You would expect Edwards to tackle the older Ventures material well, but they are very different from the original versions - not as frantic, but still played with plenty of aggression. In fact this sounds not unlike Z Z Top! Standout cuts are a muscular "Driving Guitars", an even more muscular "Diamond Head", a surprisingly good wah-wahed "Bulldog", the two Spencer Davis numbers, and a scorching blues infested "Honky Tonk"! The tracks associated with McGee are handled very well, demonstrating that Edwards had been paying attention in his absence, so much so, that Nokie's technique had taken on board a few McGeeisms. "Proud Mary", however, is pure Edwards - an incredible chicken-scratch re-construction of the Creedence song, and the best track here. 1972 was Mel Taylor's last live album (for the time being) and he took the opportunity to demonstrate that he was one of the most powerful drummers ever. Would "Caravan" ever be the same? (M - 8 ** Q - 9)

Disc 3 - ON STAGE '73 VOLUME ONE

The Cruel Sea;California Dreamin';I'm A Man;Kyoto Doll/Paint It Black; Classical Gas;Gimme Some Lovin';Runaway (V);Jambalaya (V);Honky Tonk; Diamond Head;Skylab;Oh, My Love.

Disc 4 - ON STAGE '73 VOLUME TWO

Manchurian Beat;Stranger In Midoosuji (V);Kyoto Doll (V);Apache; Slaughter On Tenth Avenue;The House Of The Rising Sun;Driving Guitars; Pipeline;Wipe Out;Caravan;Caravan '74;Caravan '75;Caravan '76.

Puzzling this. Why "On Stage '73" has not been fitted onto disc three in its entirety, leaving disc four to take "On Stage '74" is anybody's guess. Instead Toshiba have put the first half of 73's double LP onto disc 3, and the second half onto disc 4 - bolstering the latter disc with "Caravan '74", "Caravan '75", and "Caravan '76" from their respective albums! This means that disc 4 ends with almost forty minutes of "Caravan", and overall, this boxed set contains nearly 58

minutes of "Caravan"! Madness! Comparing the track listing with the previous years also reveals no less than fifteen titles are duplicated. The Japanese clearly had a voracious appetite for live collections, and a phrase incorporating the terms "cake" and "eat it" springs to mind. The most notable change is the replacement of Mel Taylor by Joe Barille. The drummers had very different styles, and whereas Mel would pound away, Joe had a lighter touch with the power kept in reserve for when needed. If anything, this set is even better than the previous years. Furious pace once again (the shows title was "Hot Summer R&R"), and "Pipeline", "Slaughter", "Cruel Sea", and "Driving Guitars" are all given stirring treatments. Nice return for "California Dreamin'" and "Classical Gas" which must be the only distortion bearing rendition to date! The most unusual inclusions are both sides of a then current single in "Skylab" and "Oh, My Love", both of which work well live. "House Of The Rising Sun" is also worthy of comment - a much enhanced version and a blueprint for later recordings. As for "Caravan '73" et al, they are all great, but surely a caravan of "Caravans" is just a bit too much!

(M - 8 ** Q - 8)

POPS IN JAPAN BOX

Disc 1 - POPS IN JAPAN & POPS IN JAPAN VOLUME TWO

Blue Chateau;Hallelujah;Sentimental Guitar;Wakareta-Hito-To;Tokyo Nights;Slow Sundown;Hokkaido Skies;Kono-Tenohirani-Aio;Rainy Pavements;Yokohama Lights;Black Sand Beach;Road To Somewhere/Max A Go-Go;Koyubi-No-Omoide;Kirino-Kanatani;Koi;Blue Fountain;Ano-Hito; Red Hot Sun;Aozora-No-Arukagiri;Kagayaku-Hoshi;Kazega-Naiteiru; In A Lonely City;Bombay Duck/BONUS - Sukiyaki;Ginza Lights;Kimi-To-Itsumademo;Yozora-No-Hoshi;Blue Sunset.

It is probably fair to say that The Ventures put less creative energy into their Japanese Pops series than their recordings for the American market. Here melodies are generally treated in a direct, straightforward way, invariably guitar led of course, and very often treated sedately, and with a rather maudlin sounding organ in support. Consequently albums tend to stand or fall on the quality of their material and their overall sound. Certainly their first release in the Pops series passes muster by virtue of some decent tunes ("Blue Chateau", "Sentimental Guitar", "Slow Sundown"), and also because of the bands still relatively tough sound of 1967. Not surprisingly, the most inventive tracks on display are two of their own compositions - "Tokyo Nights" and "Yokohama Lights" - both of which carry deft touches and are cleverly arranged. However, "Black Sand Beach" from the pen of one K. Dan eclipses the pair of them. With a tight, dramatic rhythm from Don Wilson and an irresistible lead from Edwards, it qualifies as one of the bands very best - a fact somewhat belatedly recognised when re-recorded in the eighties as "Showdown At Newport".

(M - 7 ** Q - 8)

1968's volume two sounds to be a more rushed affair, carrying no originals at all and with a less impressive selection of Japanese tunes. It opens in a lively way with the peppy "Max A Go-Go" but soon settles into a more mellow groove. Perhaps the most irritating element here is an unnamed pianist who has a habit of inserting staccato fills at every available opportunity - even worse is the tango rhythm that he installs into the lamentable "Koi" - ugh! In truth there is very little else to remark upon, the only other track of note being "Aozora-No-Arukagiri" which has a stomping beat and some (at last!) aggressive lead from Edwards. There is consolation in the CD's bonus cuts - as well as the two familiar US releases there are no less than three superb compositions from K. Dan. "Kimi-To-Itsumademo" and "Blue Sunset" are among the bands most beautiful

ballads, and "Yozora-No-Hoshi" is in a similarly elevated class when it comes to first rate surfy rockers. Including the bonus cuts lifts the M rating by two. (M - 6 ** Q - 8)

Disc 2 - GOLDEN POPS & POPS IN JAPAN '71

Kyoto Doll;Midnight Guitar;Scat In The Dark;Forbidden Love;Why Do You Mind;On A Narrow Street;Why;Sometimes I Feel Longing For A Motherless Child;The Wanderer;Suddenly Someday;Wakareta-Hito-To;Reflections In A Palace Lake/Misty Night;To Be Together Again;Mata-Au-Hi-Made;Hanayome;Naruto;Nagasaki Memories;Stranger In Midoosuji;Daremo-Inai-Umi;Saihate-Bojo;Nagoya Express;Electric Monsoon;Spring Of Love;Shiretoko Of Hokkaido/BONUS - Manchurian Beat;Tora Tora Tora.

"Golden Pops" comes from 1970 and features the McGee led band with John Durrill in the keyboards seat. It opens brightly with their own "Kyoto Doll" and the charming "Midnight Guitar" for which Durrill creates an especially memorable organ setting. From there on in it is a pleasant and distinctly low-key journey as we amble between slow and mid-paced ballads of one sort or another. Things do perk up a little towards the end with a moderately bustling "The Wanderer" (not Dion's hit), and "Suddenly Someday", which is vastly improved by Durrill's attractive organ work. Presumably short of a number, they also pressed "Wakareta-Hito-To" from the first "Pops In Japan" set into action once more. The album does finish on a high note with the bands superior original - "Reflections In A Palace Lake" - which has McGee at his considerable best on a haunting melody. (M - 5 ** Q - 8)

Featuring the same McGee/Durrill line-up, "Pops In Japan '71" follows on in a similar vein to their previous years offering. It is difficult to find too much to say about another collection that seldom rises above okay level - there is nothing to offend, but similarly there is not too much to excite either. "Hanayome" is quite perky with some jaunty piano thrown in, and there is the odd phrase that catches the attention, but mainly it just slips on by... As John Beddington pointed out, two of the better tracks here - "Naruto" and "Nagoya Express" - later had brass added and were used on their "Shaft" LP as "Thunder Cloud" and "Tight Fit". Cheeky, what? (M - 5 ** Q - 8)

Disc 3 - POPS IN JAPAN '73 & BONUS CUTS

Gakuseigai No Kissaten;Between Stage;Wait For Me;Seto-No-Hanayome;Prima Vera;Dreams Of Yesterday;Tadoritsuitara-Itsumo-Amefuri;A Night Of Our Trip;Don't Leave Me;I Want You To Love Me Tonight;Sapporo Summer;Oriental Love Song;Summer Affair;Oh, My Love/BONUS - Squaw Man;Prima Vera;Samovar;Keep Japan Beautiful;Suzukake-No-Michi;Sunflower;Beautiful Sunday.

By 1973's Pops collection McGee and Taylor had flown the coup, replaced by a certain Mr Edwards and new boy Joe Barille on drums. Anyone hoping for a return to past glories would have been disappointed. Nokie simply picks up where Gerry had left off, coasting through another set of so-so tunes and pleasant ballads. The general sound, logically enough, is vaguely reminiscent of the same years "Only Hits" album, with Wilson growing forever less audible, largely superseded by keyboards or mixed too low. A frustrating outing too for Barille who is clearly a sharp stickman, for he has little chance to shine here. His best moments come on "Wait For Me" with its crisp around the kit rolls (and, hey, isn't Neil Sedaka's "Sing Me" in there someplace?), whilst Nokie's is on "Tadoritsuitara-Itsumo-Amefuri", although sadly it fades just as he is getting really stuck in! Best tracks are "Night Of Our Trip" - a reasonable tune enhanced by a melancholic

harmonica; "Summer Affair", where Edwards' supremely sensitive playing lifts an average melody onto another plateau altogether; "Oh, My Love" chiefly for its amazing mid-flow tempo change; and "Oriental Love Song" - a shameless rip-off of Jerry Goldsmith's "Tora Tora Tora", maybe that should have been "Tut Tut Tut". No second LP here so we get seven bonus cuts instead. A motley crew they are too - "Prima Vera" has added brass to no great effect; there is a very fine, punchy reading of "Samovar" (thanks mainly to Barille), and ditto those comments for the live recording of "Keep Japan Beautiful"; and a semi-vocal version of Daniel Boone's "Beautiful Sunday" - almost certainly sung in white flairs and matching waistcoats! (M - 5 ** Q - 8)

Disc 4 - FIFTEEN YEARS OF JAPANESE POPS

Kuroi-Hanabira; Kimi-Koishi; Konnichiwa-Akachan; Omoide-No-Nagisa; Kiri-No-Mashuko; Tenshi-No-Yuuwaku; Chiisana Snack; Kyoo-De-Owakare; Kuchinashi-No-Hana; Yozora; Kokoro-Moyou; Erimo-Misaki; Futari-De-Osake-O; Tsuikoku; Waga-Yoki-Tomo-Yo/BONUS - Joy Ride; Karelia; Minyo Disco North To South.

1975's "Fifteen Years" sees Dave Carr safely ensconced in the keyboards seat, effectively drowning out any chance we had of hearing Don Wilson. Perhaps it does not matter too much anyway as, on the whole, we are talking about limp performances of bland material. The band ambles sedately from one undistinguished tune to another, and Dave Carr actually insures that a couple - "Kyoo De-Owakare" and "Kiri-No-Mashuko" - are almost unlistenable by his use of whining, over-vibratoed synth that rather resembles a musical saw! Best moments are - "Omoide-No-Nagisa" - an assured Edwards' performance of a modestly good melody; "Kokoro-Moyou" for its repetitive hook, and "Waga-Yoki-Tomo-Yo", a cute, chirpy number to close the set. The bonus cut "Joy Ride" - the CD's sole group composition from Bogle and Wilson - is easily the finest thing on show. A decent tune, a tight, compelling performance, which only serves to make the rest seem all the more lacklustre by comparison. (M - 4 ** Q - 8)

SUMMARY	Number	Period	Music total	Sound quality	Maximum possible
Box 4	Toshiba TOCP 7137-40	1967-1969	53	63	80
Box 5	Toshiba TOCP 7141-44	1970-1972	44	59	70
Live Vol 2	Toshiba TOCP 7149-52	1971-1973	24	26	30
Pops Box	Toshiba TOCP 7145-48	1967-1975	32	48	60

The first thing we should say in our summary is that the question mark that sometimes appeared over the sound quality of boxes one, two and three has disappeared - these later productions all sound good. As to the music...Box 4 hints at the beginnings of a dilemma for would be purchasers. Less consistent than the previous boxes, it offers highs ("Super Psychedelics", "Underground Fire") and lows ("Million Dollar Weekend", "Hawaii Five-O") in equal proportions, together with more than its fair share of those perched somewhere in between. John Beddington's mixed feelings concerning box 5 are entirely justified when you consider its contents. At this time The Ventures were seemingly undergoing a crisis of identity and direction - alternating rock and MOR releases in a bewildering display of musical schitzophrenia. "Tenth Anniversary" was a bizarre release in the circumstances. Instead of the celebration of the rock instrumental tradition that you would have expected, The Ventures appeared keen to abandon the whole thing in a headlong embrace of MOR. Their very next release ("New Testament") showed them trying to cross Santana with Led Zeppelin! John gives a firm thumbs up to the second edition of the live boxes, although there are

reservations about its composition (why no "On Stage '74"), and the amount of title duplication (do you really NEED six versions of "Caravan"?). I think that John would also concur with me when I say that the first volume of the live boxes remains the more desirable/essential of the two. On the face of it the Japanese Pops box is an attractive proposition, carrying as it does, a plethora of titles that are unavailable elsewhere. The catch is that much of the material is mediocre and that the bands performances tend to be correspondingly pedestrian. Basically too little spread over too much. One solution is to seek out the "Pops In Japan" set that I reviewed back in issue 13. Not only does this single CD carry the first LP in its entirety, but it also adds another eight tracks, and includes just about every truly classic cut from the complete series. Now that really is boxing clever!

BEST BOX BUYS

1. History Box Volume Three
 2. History Box Volume One
 3. History Box Volume Two
 4. Live Box Volume One
- (all above reviewed in issue 16)

THE VENTURES

"YOUR NAVY PRESENTS"

Cassette

(Available from Arild Pettersson at Maravagen 27, S-782-00, Malung, Sweden for £10, which includes post and packing.)

Navy Theme; Little Bit Me, Little Bit You; Secret Agent Man; Out Of Limits; Memphis; Woolly Bully; La Bamba; House Of The Rising Sun; Bumble Bee; Walk Don't Run '64; Bulldog; Caravan; Wipe Out; Apache; Pipeline; Slaughter On Tenth Avenue.

"Welcome aboard!" So begins this most bizarre of rarities. What we have here is a tape of four separate programmes, presumably broadcast on radio around 1967, and aimed at recruiting able-bodied Americans into Uncle Sam's navy! Each show lasts for about 15 minutes and is presented by Dick Clark. He chats with Don Wilson in between extolling the virtues and opportunities afforded by a life on the waves. Do not expect any penetrating questions though, this is all carefully scripted stuff - your taking-care-of-business self-promotion deal. More importantly each segment boasts three or four tracks by the band plus a theme tune (a cousin of "Memphis") that bookends each show. All of these tracks have been especially recorded and are basically studio run-throughs, a little unpolished, but absolutely fascinating! You can now hear what "Little Bit Me, Little Bit You" and "Woolly Bully" etc sounded like in the studio when performed by just the four pieces, and what "Secret Agent Man" was like minus the normal vocal embellishments. Evidently these programmes were stored on vinyl, hence there is the odd bit of surface noise to contend with, although for the most part the quality is good enough. What with timing being paramount on radio there is also some ham-fisted hacking on "Secret Agent Man" and "Out Of Limits" - presumably so that they would fit into some time slot. Having got all that negative stuff out of the way, let's get on and tell you that this is wonderful! Everything sounds so fresh and vital, and it is a treat to hear this precisely as you would have heard it on the radio back in '67. The magical Mosrites are in full flow on the likes of "Walk Don't Run '64"; "Bulldog" sounds as tough and compelling as ever; and "Pipeline" better than their kosher kut. A unique opportunity to hear The Ventures recorded in the raw and at their peak - fans should not miss it. Okay, Admiral. Where do I sign?

DB

THE VENTURES

"PLAY MEGA HITS"
(Toshiba TOCP, Japan)

CD

Kimi Ga Irudakede;Yah Yah Yah;Bridge-Ano Hashi O Watarutoki;Kimi Ga Kagayaki Tsuzukeru Yohni;No No Darlin';The Sun Also Rises;Namida No Kiss;Haretara Iine;Two On The Beach;Shonan Shores;Memories Of Love.

Record companies! Don't ya just love 'em? Ten tracks were recorded for this new Ventures CD but, evidently, only eight could be used due to contractual reasons. So what does Toshiba do? Ask The Ventures to record replacement tracks? Sort out the problem? Search around for some obscure little treats perhaps? Naaa, not Toshiba. They simply lift three tracks from The Ventures CD before this one and lump them on at the end. No matter that the Ventures loyal fans may have just a few months earlier forked out for these very same tracks on "Flyin' High". Ever been had? What a shabby way to treat the band and their fans. Pity too, because on the evidence of the eight new tracks The Ventures do seem to be moving in the right direction. The main improvement here is that Dave Carr's too prominent and usually MOR-ish synthesiser embellishments have been axed, and instead we have Greg Leisz on steel guitar. This proves to be a much better idea as Leisz stays mainly in the background and does not suffocate the band with excess dressing. The opening track is a small delight, a very pretty little tune delicately and sensitively handled by McGee and the crew. Next up is "Yah Yah Yah" which finds the band slipping on a tougher styled AOR coat with power chords, pumping bass, and a plodding beat - very good it is too. "Bridge" utilizes the same approach but ups the tempo and adds some biting rhythm guitar to prod things along and encourage McGee into some flashy soloing. After this the standard dips slightly - "Kimi Ka Kagayaki" has a half decent hook to recommend it but little else, whilst "No No Darlin'" revisits their summery soul/funk/jazz sound of a few releases back. "The Sun Also Rises" has the band back with the pumping AOR style, highlighted by McGee's brief fuzzy solo. "Namida No Kiss" features a nice solid rhythm from Don Wilson and a pleasing mixture of acoustic, electric and steel guitar solos. "Haretara Iine" rounds off the new tracks and probably illustrates better than any other the problem that the band has - namely mediocre material. It is a credit to them that they are able to make such lightweight tunes as listenable as they do. The sound is great, the production spacious and clear, the musicianship exemplary, and Greg Leisz's steel guitar work fits snugly into the group sound. I still believe that a better avenue for The Ventures would be for them to tackle the American mega hits - the AOR anthems of the eighties like Survivor's "Eye Of The Tiger", Van Halen's "Jump" and Starship's "We Built This City On Rock'n'Roll". Like them or not they do at least have memorable tunes, and that - frankly - is what The Ventures are missing.

REVIEW SECTION

FIRST VENTURES!!!

SEE FOR MILES begin a re-issue programme of 2-on-1 CDs

THE VENTURES "WALK DON'T RUN"/"THE VENTURES" CD
(See For Miles C5HCD618, UK)

Morgan/Raunchy/The Switch/Home/My Own True Love/Walk Don't Run/Night Train/No Trespassing/The McCoy/Caravan/Sleepwalk/Honky Tonk//The Shuck/Detour/Perfidia/Carolina Moon/Lonesome Town/Up's'n'Down's/Moon Of Mankoorra/Hawaiian War Chant/Blue Tango/Ram-Bunk-Shush/Wailin'/Torquay.

THE VENTURES "ANOTHER SMASH!"/"THE COLOURFUL" CD
(See For Miles C5HCD619, UK)

Riders In The Sky/Wheels/Raw-Hide/Meet Mr Callaghan/Bulldog/Lonely Heart/Ginchy/Lullaby Of The Leaves/Trambone/Last Date/Beyond The Reef/Josie//Blue Moon/Yellow Jacket/Bluer Than Blue/Red Top/Orange Fire/Greenfields/Green Leaves Of Summer/White Silver Sands/Yellow Bird/Blue Skies/Cherry Pink & Apple Blossom White/Silver City.

At last one of the specialist re-issue labels has woken up to the profits to be made in making The Ventures' back catalogue available in an affordable manner. I say affordable because, of course, the Japanese "costafortune" boxes have covered the same ground, but with only the financially blessed and the seriously obsessive purchasing them there should be no shortage of takers for these much more reasonable two LPs on one CD at around twelve quid. I compared the sound quality of these to the Japanese versions from Toshiba and to my mind the See For Miles were slightly cleaner and clearer with a bit more brightness about them, giving them the edge as regards sound quality. As for the music, well these two CDs pull together The Ventures' first four LPs recorded between 1960 and 1961. As such they represent the formative recording years of the band. In terms of content they follow pretty much the standard formula for an instrumental group in those days - the hit single, a couple of other band's recent hits, update of a few standards, plus a couple of the group's own compositions for good measure. It has to be said though that The Ventures made good use of the formula very often bringing clever arrangements to the standards (*Night Train*, *Blue Tango*, *Blue Skies*) introducing a few that were less familiar (*Meet Mt Callaghan*, *Morgan*, *Hawaiian War Chant*) putting in respectable covers (*Bulldog*, *Torquay*, *Sleepwalk*) often improving on the originals (*Ginchy*, *Raw-Hide*, *Wailin'*)

and, best of all, turning up aces when it came to their own compositions. For sheer inventiveness *No Trespassing* surpassed most other inclusions, whilst other originals like *Yellow Jacket* and *The McCoy* manifested a power that the competition would find hard to match. In short The Ventures may have been doing the same as everyone else but they were also doing it better than anybody else. Their first album is naturally the most raw and basic, the second a little more polished with a warmer sounding guitar tone, the third - *Another Smash!* - was basically a holding operation with the band adding strings to a couple of the tracks, an experiment that they continued on their thematic fourth *The Colourful Ventures*. Each album boasts its own highlights - the delicately picked *Morgan* and a bunch of creative originals from the first, the compellingly rhythmic *Up's'n'Down's* and the explosive *Wailin'* from the second, from the third the exciting *Raw-Hide* with its push-it-to-the-limit guitar breaks and its plaintive sounding ballad *Josie*, and from the last of the quartet the driving *Red Top*, the charming western vignette *Silver City*, as well as the pulsating *Orange Fire*. Frankly, you'd have to be daft as a brush to miss these. Let's hope that See For Miles continue further with their programme of Ventures' re-issues - at least as far as the mid-sixties when they were, for a brief magic period, leading the entire rock field. DB

#30/31
Pipeline 26 [1995] 62-63

THE VENTURES

"THE WHITE ALBUM"
(Resurgence 005, UK)

Cassette

Greenfields;Over The Mountain;Moon Of Manakoora;Blue Star;I Can't
Stop LOving You;Stranger On The Shore;Genesis;Beyond The Reef;
Yellow Bird;Green Leaves Of Summer;Born To Lose;Sukiyaki;Last Date;
Home;Harlem Nocturne;Love Goddess Of Venus;Changing Tides;Sleep Walk;
Only The Young;The Lonely Sea;My Own True Love;Adventures In Paradise

THE VENTURES

"THE VENTURES RARITIES"
(Resurgence 004. UK)

Cassette

The Switch;High Tide;Solar Race;Haunting Memories;The Way You Look
Tonight;Command Ship Earth;The Twomp (V);Heart On My Sleeve (V);
Cookies And Coke 1 (V);The Real McCoy 1;Cookies And Coke 2 (V);The
Real McCoy 2;I Love You Yes I Do (V);The Twomp 2 (V);The Mercenary;
Dear Miss Lonely Hearts 1 (V);Dear Miss Lonely Hearts 2 (V);Let The
Four Winds Blow;Sugaree;Peace Pipe (The Marksmen);Sunny River (The
Marksmen);Moody River (V);Pied Piper (V);Amanda's Theme;Popcorn;
Paliachi Joe (V);Seattle In The Rain;Paliachi Joe;Ano Domini;
Harlem Nocturne;Coffee House Blues;Cry Of The Wild Goose (V);For
Your Love (V);Seattle In The Rain (V);Bad Boy (V);Seattle In The
Rain 2 (V);I Want To Live;Walk Don't Run;Home

Two cassettes put out by Gerry Woodage's Ventures Club, the first being a tape version of the legendary "BG101" or "White Album" - an LP pressed up by the band in 1966 in minuscule quantities for their own personal pleasure. It consisted of 22 ballad tracks - all standard issue - pulled from the band's album output. All bar two cuts that is. "Genesis" was a rare-ish US 45 side and, far more importantly, "Adventures In Paradise" was only ever included on this pressing. Afraid I may have to puncture feverish expectations by saying that the track is perfectly pleasant - but not outstanding. Probably recorded in '61 it would have been particularly at home on the band's second album sharing, as it does, a similar South Seas feel to "Moon Of Manakoor". Overall the tape is most relaxing and enjoyable focusing, unusually, on the band's gentler, more melodic sounds of the sixties. It is good to report too that the band's own in-house compositions such as "Changing Tides", "Love Goddess Of Venus" and "The Lonely Sea" stand equally as high as their mainly better known companions. Sound quality of both tapes is very good (allowing for understandable wear of some acetates on the second tape) and these are certainly better than the earlier "Rarities" tapes put out by the club. The "Rarities" cassette under consideration today covers a multitude of styles and spans right from '61 up to the mid-seventies. It is mainly the sixties though - the two obvious seventies cuts, "Popcorn" and "Command Ship Earth", being full of awful farting moogs, although there are the much better "I Want To Live" (sounds like the backing track for "Too Young Too Know My Mind" to me), "The Mercenary", and "Amanda's Theme" which has something of a Russian feel to it complete with what sounds like added balalaika! Don Wilson clearly had a strong yen to be a pop balladeer in the emotive Del Shannon mould and a lot of the vocal tracks witness him pledging his eternal love or pleading with the girl of his dreams for another chance (what a bunch of saps we were!). Earliest of these are probably "For Your Love" and "Heart On Your Sleeve" with Don sounding like a heart-broken teenager, although on the still earlier pop rockabilly of "Cookie And Coke" he actually sounds quite cheerful! Later on he moves into a more country-ish direction, initially with Marty Wilde's "Bad Boy", and then adopting the typical story-telling approach of country on "Seattle In The Rain" and "Paliachi Joe". The most intriguing vocal is "Dear Miss Lonely Heart" which ended up as

the instrumental "Lonely Heart" on the flip of "Ram-Bunk-Shush". It confirms that whilst Don had a modest vocal talent sticking to rhythm guitar was the right career move. A couple of the instrumentals are really just unfinished backing tracks such as Rusty York's "Sugaree" and Roy Brown's "Let The Four Winds Blow". From the sound of it both have Howie Johnson on drums (as does "The Way You Look Tonight") and illustrate perfectly what a power the band were in those early days. "Peace Pipe" (The Shads old number) and "Sunny River", both credited to The Marksmen, are both very appealing with the latter featuring acoustic guitar lead and warm electric piano chords giving it a rather different tone to the version that appeared on the "Twist Party" album. Undoubtedly the two monster tracks of the tape though are "Harlem Nocturne" and "High Tide". "Nocturne" is completely different to the band's earlier version of the tune, this is a kind of sultry heavy metal treatment, sort of crossing "He Never Came Back" with "Walkin' With Pluto" with amazing results. Perhaps even better is "High Tide" recorded, I would imagine, around '64 just as the band were rising to their peak. As its title implies it is a surf hybrid and again it is the power and the precision of the band itself that lifts it to the skies. I swear that there could not have been another four-piece around that could have lived with The Ventures at that time - they were so tight and really gelled as one cohesive unit. Inevitably then, a curate's egg, as rarity projects are invariably bound to be. There is nothing terribly awful here (well, there is Don's cheesy vocal on "I Love You Yes I Do"), the unfinished tracks can be a little frustrating, but there are many good tracks, a couple of real crackers, and - to a Ventures fan - just about everything will be totally fascinating.

DB

Available from: Gerry Woodage, 13 Limetree Close, Grove, Wantage,
Oxon, OX12 0DJ, England.

THE VENTURES "TWIST WITH THE VENTURES" / "TWIST PARTY Vol. 2" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 621; UK; 51 mins)

*Driving Guitars / The Twist / Road Runner / Gringo / Moon Dawg / Guitar Twist / Opus Twist /
 Movin' n' Groovin' / Sunny River / Let's Twist Again / Shanghied / Bumble Bee Twist //
 My Bonnie Lies / Twisted / The Twomp / Besame Mucho / Blue Tail Fly / Swanee River Twist /
 Instant Guitars / Dark Eyes Twist / Counterpoint / Kicking Around / Bluebird / Red Wing Twist*

THE VENTURES "A GO-GO" / "WHERE THE ACTION IS" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 622; UK; 58 mins)

*Satisfaction / Go-Go Slow / Louie Louie / Night Stick / La Bamba; The In Crowd / Woolly Bully /
 A Go-Go Guitar / A Go-Go Dancer / The Swingin' Creeper / Whittier Boulevard / I Like It Like That //
 Action Lies / Fever / Stop Action / 3's A Crowd / A Taste Of Honey / No Matter What Shape /
 Action Plus / Hang On Sloopy / Nutty / Little Bit Of Action / She's Just My Style*

THE VENTURES "PLAY THE CARPENTERS" / "THE JIM CROCE SONGBOOK" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 620; UK; 74 mins)

*We've Only Just Begun / Yesterday Once More / It's Going To Take Some Time / Bless The Beasts And
 The Children / Top Of The World / Sing / Superstar / Close To You / Hurting Each Other / Rainy Days
 And Mondays / Jambalaya / Goodbye To Love // I Got A Name / Bad Bad Leroy Brown / I Have To Say I
 Love You In A Song / Lover's Cross / It Doesn't Have To Be That Way / Age / Time In A Bottle / Don't
 Mess Around With Jim / One Less Set Of Footsteps / Operator / Five Short Minutes / Speedball Trucker*

These Ventures CDs were recently reviewed in Q, the monthly glossy rock mag, and were awarded three stars... BETWEEN THEM! Yes, one star apiece that is. So are our normally quite reliable friends from Q seriously amiss on this one, or have these albums been resurrected from hell as they seem to think? Not surprisingly I go for the former. The problem is that, according to the popular rockist ethic, nothing much happened before The Beatles and anyway instrumentals are merely the result of a lazy lyricist. Why bother to take them seriously, or even listen to them for that matter? To be fair it must be difficult for someone who did not experience the early sixties to apply any kind of context in which to frame these, but of course that is no real excuse for a professional critic. Just a few months ago at a Man or Astroman gig I witnessed a hall full of 18 to 25 year olds really getting off on The Ventures' "The Creeper" - presumably because they were too young to have any pre-conceptions and instead relied on their own instincts to tell them what was good. To them, even The Beatles are "old music". (I'm glad I got that lot off my chest!)

For dedicated Pipeliners the questions are more likely to be: are these better than the previously released items in the Japanese box sets, and could these be said to be the definitive versions? Well, yes and no. There is no doubt in my mind that these are superior to the Toshiba efforts. There is a shade more clarity about the top end whilst the bass is fuller, giving an overall fatter, more rounded sound. Subjectively there is also an extra warmth about them that I prefer. However, I shrink from declaring these (the two sixties CDs that is) to be "definitive" versions. The fact is that both display some indential characteristics. Listen, for example, to "The Twomp" and you will hear the same background buzz run through both versions, whilst Mel Taylor is invariably locked into the right channel with the resultant lessening of power that you would expect. The improvement in sound quality that the See For Miles CDs offer is probably either down to greater care in the digital transfer or because they may have been working from an earlier generation tape. Comparison with EMI's Legendary Masters set, where tracks have been re-mixed by Larry

Walsh and Ron Furmanek, proved interesting. On "Twisted", which opens with a persistent drum beat, Mel Taylor had sensibly been spread over both channels instead of confined to one and the result is a much better sounding track. However, the re-mixed "Road Runner" seemed less impressive with a tonal change to bass guitar and a cut to the strange whining reverb that made the track such a standout. It seems that you cannot have it both ways, so maybe there is an argument for sticking with the SFM approach as being truer to the sound that you remember. Make up your own mind.

Musically the two sixties CDs are a delight. Despite the off-puttingly fadish titles of the two "Twist" LPs, both are a joy to listen to. The first of the pair especially is something of a revelation. Throwing off the kind of all-round approach that had tended to lend their earlier LPs a faint air of restraint, the "Twist With" set burned with aggression from start to finish. "Drivin' Guitars" set the tone with pounding tom-toms, a dark, foreboding lead guitar, a rush of rhythm and bass, and a chilling scream to announce that these guys meant business! "Moon Dawg" must have one of the most exciting openings in rock: Howie Johnson's sharply accented single stroke roll lays the platform for first rhythm and then bass before the lead guitar comes surging in to send the whole band cascading over into a racing charge for home with lots of torrid picking and demented yelping along the way! Even comparatively naff tracks such as "The Twist" and "Let's Twist Again" (there for the title strength) sound good, and with other classics such as "Road Runner" and "Shanghied" providing what, at the time, was the toughest, roughest, most uncompromising guitar sounds that you could find, you just cannot complain.

By contrast, its Volume Two sequel was a little more restrained and polished. But that too had its moments. "The Twomp" should have been a contender with its catchy "ya, ya, yeah" chorus, but most of all for its driving bass and Edwards' solo break where he drops in one perfectly timed note as Taylor rolls around the kit, pauses, and then follows up with a blistering barrage. Ah, such moments are made in heaven! "Counterpoint" provides further evidence of the band's class with an impressive display of twin lead guitar work as they experiment with melody and counter-melody on Bogle's intelligent composition. Together these two LPs make for a cracking combination,

bettered only by.....

By the time that we make the leap forward from 1962 to 1965, the band had practically re-invented itself. The fairly straightforward cleanly-played guitar approach had gone, replaced by an arsenal of fresh exciting sounds as the band mixed heavy fuzz guitar with wailing organ, absorbed the best from the surfing style and re-interpreted it through the tones of the Mosrite, and generally explored the sounds that the studio had to offer, often with ingenious results. Actually this period is one that The Ventures often get an unfair bashing for from latter-day critics who see them merely as second-hand peddlers of other's songs. *So wrong!* "Satisfaction" would have meant very little without the fuzz riff that runs through it and sustains the track - and we all know where The Stones got that idea from! Likewise even bands as good as The McCoys and The Knickerbockers couldn't match the aggressive sound that The Ventures were able to produce.

The fact is that The Ventures' treatments of third party songs was normally *preferred* to the original and not regarded as a substitute version in the way that critics seem to view them. When it came to originals, The Ventures were in a class of their own at this time. What other band could have come up with something as brilliant as "The Swingin' Creeper"? I mean, in one single track they combined a surf rhythm, a jazz feel, heavy fuzz guitar, some cool Jimmy Smith-style organ and enough sinister guitar sounds to frighten even Peter Cushing! Really mindblowing stuff. "A Go-Go" is just choc full of wonderful sounds. "Night Stick" and its close cousin "A Go-Go Dancer" are given a real tension by muting the strings and bringing Taylor forward to drive home the beat. "Louie Louie" may lack the frantic mayhem of The Kingsmen's hit but oh, the sound of that Mosrite more than makes up for it. "A Go-Go Guitar", really a workout around Chuck Berry's "Memphis", is another feast to the ears - not particularly original but again, like everything else here, it just sounds so absolutely great.

Where The Action Is is every bit as good an album too! One of the main differences between the two is the prominence of Don Wilson on the latter LP. Listen to the way that he really scrubs that rhythm guitar on "Action", and on "Stop Action" it is a contest between Edwards on lead and Wilson on rhythm to see who is going to achieve meltdown first! Another original, "Action Plus", has the band taking on that rolling kind of

"Telstar" space rhythm, but of course with a lot more bite and sting to the guitars which makes it all so much better. Typically The Ventures have the audacity to take on B Bumble's classic "Nut Rocker", stand it on its head, re-arrange it to fit their own style, and deliver it with more sting than Bumble ever managed! The album rounds off with Gary Lewis' excellent "She's Just My Style" and proves yet again that an instrumental version of a good song is just as effective as a vocal. Wonderful, wonderful stuff and another cracking pairing!

After looking at two CDs from the band's golden age we move on to one that could be described as being from their dark age - the early to mid-seventies. At the time The Ventures seemed unable or unwilling to come to terms with the radical direction that rock music was then taking and instead opted out to pursue a more MOR direction. Whilst diehard fans convinced themselves that this was as good as that which had gone before, much of the band's audience decided that for them this was no longer where the action was and moved on to other sounds. Consequently the Carpenters and Jim Croce releases were only ever available in a limited way and are amongst The Ventures' hardest to find vinyl issues. See For Miles are to be applauded for making this sensible pairing available for re-appraisal.

Overall they are very similar sounding and might almost have been cut at the same session, although the "Jim Croce Songbook" does feature considerably more acoustic playing. The most surprising element about both is how much Nokie

Edwards sounds like Gerry McGee! Obviously Edwards had been listening to McGee during his absence from the band and had absorbed some of his replacement's mannerisms. The excellent Joe Barile is on drums, although there is not much room to shine on such undemanding material, and Dave Carr adds his usual professional (and dull) keyboard contributions. This is strictly ensemble playing and largely succeeds or fails on the prowess of the lead guitarist and the quality of the tunes. Whilst I have no doubts about the former, the melodies of Jim Croce seem rather mediocre to my ears. The problem is that a lot of the appeal of a Croce song is in the lyrics and the man's delivery of them. It's a bit like an instrumental version of Dylan's "Masters Of War", without Bob's bitter denouncement it wouldn't mean too much.

On the other hand The Carpenters had melodies in spades. Even those of you sad enough to be immune from the appeal of Karen Carpenter's pure, honey-toned voice, cannot deny the quality of songs such as "We've Only Just Begun" and "Close To You". The Carpenters clearly chose their material extremely carefully and so there is nary a duff tune to be spotted on the whole album. The Ventures handle them with respect and care and this half of the programme wins hands down for me. The likelehood is that those of you with a taste for MOR will be highly chuffed to discover both these albums. The unrepentent, like me, will wonder why there isn't any heavy fuzz guitar and surfing slides and will probably need a quick shot of "The Swingin' Creeper" to recover. DB

THE VENTURES**"WALK DON'T RUN Vol.2 / KNOCK ME OUT"****CD**

(See For Miles C5HCD 630; UK; 58 min)

*House Of The Rising Sun / Diamond Head / Night Train / Peach Fuzz / Rap City / Blue Star /
Walk Don't Run '64 / Night Walk / One Mint Julep / Pedal Pusher / The Creeper /
Stranger On The Shore ; I Feel Fine / Love Potion Number 9 / Tomorrow's Love / Oh Pretty Woman /
Mariner No 4 / When You Walk In The Room / Gone, Gone, Gone / Slaughter On 10th Avenue /
She's Not There / Lonely Girl / Bird Rockers / Sha La La.*

THE VENTURES**"GUITAR FREAKOUT / SUPER PSYCHEDELICS"****CD**

(See For Miles C5HCD 627; UK; 57 min)

*Good Thing / High And Dry / Standing In The Shadows Of Love / Off In The 93rds / Cookout Freakout
On Lookout Mountain / Wack Wack / Mod East / I'm A Believer / Guitar Freakout / Snoopy vs The Red
Baron / Paper Airplane / Theme From The Wild Angels / Strawberry Fields Forever / Psychedelic
Venture / Western Union / Guitar Psychedelics / Kandy Koncoction / Reflections / A Little Bit Me, A
Little Bit You / Endless Dream / Vibrations / Psyched-out / 1999 AD / Happy Together.*

The See For Miles re-issue programme of 2 on 1 Ventures CDs gathers pace with another pair of excellent value releases. Walk Don't Run Volume 2 originally followed in the wake of the band's triumphant return to the US singles charts with the updated version of their 1960 smash hit. At the time it seemed as though it just had to happen. The Ventures In Space LP had launched the band's own star high into the stratosphere, and the subsequent LP - The Fabulous Ventures - announced the beginning of their new guitars galore approach on cleverly arranged tracks like "Runnin' Wild" and "Scratchin".

On WDR2 the strategy was pursued and enlarged, with virtually every track being awash with hot new guitar sounds, devastating effects, and a let's bung the lot in philosophy when it came to arrangements. For some it was the end of the old melodious Ventures of the early albums but for many others, like me, it was indeed the second coming. "Night Train", for example, had been fairly straightforwardly treated on their debut LP, but here it was invested with an extra couple of guitars, a piping organ, and a thumping beat that steamed the track home. The wonderfully titled "Peach Fuzz" fairly bristles with energy with Don Wilson's cutting rhythm splicing through Edwards' gloriously fuzzed-up lead. Even when it came to ballads The Ventures were equally creative - where else could you expect to hear the lead on "Stranger On The Shore" shared by conventional, steel, fuzz, and bass guitars? On "The Creeper" the band casually demonstrated that Sandy Nelson didn't have a complete monopoly on drum based classics as they merged Taylor's thunderous percussive barrage with the fattest fuzz alive. An absolute feast of magical sounds and certainly one of the greatest instrumental albums ever made.

The Knock Me Out album was, by contrast, more of a subdued affair. The band's nod to the English invasion (even though only two of the tracks were actually British in origin), was not as bad as it might have been, although it comes nowhere near the dizzy heights scaled by its companion here. It is a solid performance however, and the band's stubbornly fuzz-enriched treatments of "Love Potion No 9" and "She's Not There" both ring the bell, whilst "When You Walk In The Room" is adorable simply for its rich, full-blooded Mosrite sound. Easily the best tracks though are the band's originals. "Tomorrow's Love" is a charming piece of confection that many UK fans may be hearing for the first time as it was replaced by "Love Goddess Of Venus" on the British pressings of the original LP. Better still are "Mariner No 4" and "Bird Rockers", both of which are to some extent influenced by Joe Meek's flowing "Telstar" rhythm and show the band in good fettle.

Criticisms? Well, while both sound better here than do their counterparts in the Japanese box sets, neither have been properly re-mixed and so "The Creeper" still sounds as if the drums are out of sync - instantly solved of course if you are lucky enough to have a mono button on your amplifier. I do have the sneaking feeling that The Fabulous Ventures would have been a better bedfellow for WDR2 because the former was so obviously a step on the way to the remarkable achievements of the latter, but apart

from that I can think of nothing but praise for this package.

Guitar Freakout was perhaps the first Ventures albums where you went from thinking: my God, that's awful to my God, that's brilliant, in the space of two tracks. In the latter camp were the truly inspired "High And Dry" - a Dick Dale surf theme that boasts a superb middle section with a killer bass run; the title track for its brave attempt at freeform mayhem (even if it was largely suggested by The Count Fives' great "Psychotic Reaction"); "Off In The 93rds" for its shimmering Bo Diddley styled rhythm guitar so deftly delivered by that Wilson chappie; the meaty treatment meted out to Paul Revere's "Good Thing", and the decidedly quaint "Mod East" which successfully married a sharp western beat with an exotic eastern flavoured melody. Weighing in on the scales in the thankfully much lighter crap category are "Theme From The Wild Angels" - so crass that it's not true, and "Snoopy vs The Red Baron" - a disastrous flight from good taste by anyone's standards. The only remaining detraction is a surprisingly weak version of The Monkees' "I'm A Believer", something which cannot possibly be said of the tousle-haired, cheeky-faced, teen-idols' "A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You" which graces The Ventures' Super Psychedelics album (note seamless move from one LP to the next!).

Bulging with energy, vital with vitality, it swings - largely because of the Wilson rhythm machine - better than any monkee was ever likely to. But I get ahead of myself. "Strawberry Fields Forever" actually opens the proceedings, in an immaculate fashion it has to be said, and The Ventures' sensitive, careful handling of a beautiful song begs the question - why did they record so few Beatles' tunes? Maybe because they had so many great ones of their own - as the seven Bogle / Edwards / Taylor / Wilson compositions here so ably illustrate. It is pointless to pick out any particular one really - each has its own delicious character - but all are marked out by their sheer class. On this album the band were at their creative peak, at the zenith of their abilities. Each track boasts a quality melody, an inventive arrangement, and a superb performance.

Other LPs have their strengths and virtues, but overall this has to be judged their most accomplished and mature work. It's great. It's a great package. Is that clear enough?

DB

THE VENTURES

"MASHED POTATOES AND GRAVY / GOING TO THE VENTURES DANCE PARTY" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 635, UK; 56 mins)

Lucille / Gravy / Hernando's Hideaway / Mashed Potato Time / Summertime / Hot Summer / Poison Ivy / The Wah-Watusi / Instant Mashed / Scratch / Hully Gully / Spudnik // Mr Moto / Theme From Come September / Ya Ya Wobble / Night Drive / Venus / The Intruder / Gandy Dancer / Sweet And Lovely / Limbo Rock / Lolita Ya Ya / The Locomotion / Gully-ver

THE VENTURES

"UNDERGROUND FIRE / HOLLYWOOD METAL DINAMIC SOUND 3000" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 636, UK; 75mins)

Underground Fire / Embers In E Minor / Sea Of Grass / Higher Than Thou / Up, Up And Down / Country Funk And The Canned Heat / Born To Be Wild / Sunshine Of Your Love / The Weight / Light My Fire / Down On Me / Fire // Johnny B Goode / Linda Lou / Diana / Hound Dog / Goodbye Rock'n'Roll / House Of The Rising Sun / Ready Teddy / Lucille / Rip It Up / Dance The Night Away / When The Saints Go Marching In / Lonesome Town

By coincidence the first of the above CDs contains two of the albums that Dave Towers referred to in his article concerning The Ventures use of session men in Pipeline 30. However, we shall put that issue aside and concentrate on what is within rather than who. **Mashed Potatoes** was always something of an unsatisfying album. The problem is that much of the material central to the LP is basically second rate. It seems strange to see the names of such high class writers as Barry Mann and Dave Appell alongside such lacklustre melodies as Gravy and The Wah-Watusi, and Hully Gully Baby and Mashed Potato Time are similarly nondescript tunes. The Ventures almost seem to take their cue from the standard set by these tracks and stroll through everything in a rather pedestrian way, even Little Richards' Lucille being largely bereft of excitement until the band suddenly seem to come to near the end of the track.

This is not to say that the album has nothing to recommend it though. Gershwin's Summertime does generate a certain heat with Hot Summer also building something of a sultry atmosphere. Leiber and Stoller present The Ventures with a ready-made peach of an arrangement on Poison Ivy which the band do considerable justice to and the band's own Instant Mashed has a low-key appeal. Easily the best tracks though are the two Nokie Edwards' compositions - Scratch (written with Gene Moles) and Spudnik - both of which were subsequently picked up by surf bands, although it is the latter that became known as Surf Rider and not Scratch as suggested on the track listing. An album of modest appeal.

By contrast I believe **Going To The Ventures Dance Party** to be one of the band's most undervalued LPs. Again we have several tracks that should have been jettisoned - Billy Strange's Limbo Rock is quite spineless when compared to The Champs' more meaty version, and Goffin and King's Locomotion proves to be a tattered freight train rather than the Pullman express that we might have expected; Sweet And Lovely also somehow misses the mark. These pale into insignificance in the face of some mighty inclusions. Night Drive is as dramatic an instrumental as you can find this side of Link Wray with a deep, scything lead cutting through Taylor's powering drums which climaxes with a series of hectic runs as Nokie steps into overdrive midway through. Still better is Don Wilson's classic Gandy Dancer. Taylor's drums set the scene along with his creative use of hi-hat with the intricately picked melody unfolding like some strange kind of highland fling for deranged ballet dancers! Simply wonderful.

Other minor treats abound; the quirky, cleverly arranged Ya Ya Wobble; the irresistible Venus lovingly dressed up in candyflossed WDR chords; the sinister, rather menacing sounding duo of The Intruder and Gully-ver; and even the girlie chorus cannot destroy the plaintive guitar and vibrant harpsichord (who played that I wonder?) bestowed upon Lolita Ya Ya. Altogether this is an imaginative and varied album displaying considerable flair. If you take into account the added bonus of Mashed Potatoes on this CD, well, you just can't go wrong.

In 1969 **Underground Fire** briefly suggested that The Ventures would take on the then

emerging revolutionary trends in music and make some statements of their own. Sadly its lack of commercial success meant that the band were soon retreating to a less aggressive, more MOR sound. Even so, I still feel that in some respects the album promised more than it actually delivered. The six original compositions that made up side one may have the right approach and a tough, heavy sound but they lack the basic ingredient of melody. Certainly McGee wails impressively but the rest of the band do tend to plod along in his wake. Best of the bunch is Higher Than Thou which chugs along nicely while McGee multi-tracks his chicken-scratch style of playing.

With side two the band seem to have found the missing element. Steppenwolf's Born To Be Wild bursts from the speakers flexing its angry muscles, but in a tuneful way, and this is much more like it. Cream's Sunshine Of Your Love momentarily returns us to the plod of earlier tracks (they should have picked Badge or I Feel Free!), but The Band's melodious The Weight soon restores the balance. The Doors' Light My Fire is such an inspired piece of music (pinched from a classical origin) that it would be difficult for any competent musicians to spoil it. Of course The Ventures are more than competent and I find their version infinitely preferable to the original - the rolling bass and rhythm, the wandering, searching organ and the dark toned guitar are all judged to absolute perfection. Janis Joplin's Down On Me makes a neat sandwich filling before we are back again to the album's second tour de force. Fire dispenses with the ludicrous Arthur Brown vocal and goes straight for the core of the conflagration with Taylor's pounding drums, wailing organ, and McGee's tortured guitar licks stoking up the blaze to melting point as the track disappears into the fade. Overall this is a good album alright, but if only they had stuck in another couple of heavy killers with tunes (or at least memorable riffs) such as Black Sabbath's Paranoid and Deep Purple's Black Night we would have been talking major works.

The circumstances of Underground Fire's bedfellow - **Hollywood Metal Dinamic Sound 3000** -deserve a little explaining. This began life as backing tracks for a Japanese vocalist named Yuya Uchida. The Ventures recorded their part

in Los Angeles and the tapes were then sent to Japan where Uchida, by all accounts, ruined them by dubbing on his unconvincing and poorly pronounced vocals. At the time of its release in 1975 Ventures product was still being hotly sought in Japan and so the band were asked to re-mix the collection replacing the vocals with guitar leads. Co-incidentally the big growth area in Japan happened to be the cassette and so the new album was put out on that medium - but on no other. Gerry Woodage and See For Miles are to be congratulated for making available such a bona fide rarity.

So what of the music? The opening Johnny B Goode fair takes your breath away. Nokie squeezes in just about every known Berryism and then adds umpteen tricks and twists of his own but, unlike comparable whiz guitarists, he never loses sight of the melody or the basic framework of the song. Just brilliant! The following Linda Lou is just as gritty with, again, Nokie soloing like a man with something to prove while the band swing along convincingly behind him. On Diana we have Bob Bogle tackling the lead duties and characteristically he wrings every nuance of emotion from what is in fact a very fine melody indeed. Biff Vincent trades piano licks with Nokie's guitar on Hound Dog, a duel that is expertly repeated on the guys' original Goodbye Rock'n'Roll - obviously they didn't mean it because it rocks quite nicely! House Of The Rising Sun may be one of their most visited songs but there is no denying the high amount of emotion that they manage to cram into this version.

So, criticisms? Well, this does sound like a seventies band playing R&R. It's not quite earthy enough and it is perhaps a bit too slick to be authentic R&R. Rip It Up, for example, could be more appropriately titled as Let's Tear It Rather Carefully! The brass section does add power although, again, it is a bit too organised to include anything of the original flavour of R&R. Still, that said, this is a delightful and unexpected addition to the Ventures re-issue programme. Basically it is a group of seasoned musicians having fun in the studio with a set of old favourites, doing a bit of showing-off, and enjoying the opportunity to just blow free! I think that we owe Yuya Uchida a large debt of thanks!

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

"WILD AGAIN"

CD

(Toshiba TOCP8911; Japan)

Baja / Wham / Beethoven Five-Oh / Quiet Village / Teenbeat / James Bond Theme / Midnight In Moscow / Exodus / Happy Organ / Quick Silver / Ajoen Ajoen / Petite Fleur / A Minor In Paradise / Bongo Rock / A Walk In The Black Forest / Zwolf Munchen Und Ein Man / The Lonely Surfer

There is already a surge of jubilation vibrating from The Ventures camp over this CD which is confidently being touted as a major return to form for the band. Certainly *Baja* opens the account in a splendid way with Neil Norman's crystal clear sit-you-right-down-amongst-the-band production completely making up for the loss of the cavernous reverb of The Astronauts' original. The swiftly ensuing *Wham!* hits you right between the eyes, with McGee taking on Lonnie Mack's delightful organ-ish sound and whizzing around the fretboard as though he was chasing some amphetamined fly in a kamikaze duel. As beginnings go this is a bit of a double-barrelled blast!

Suddenly though disaster strikes in the shape of *Beethoven Five-Oh*. Oh, oh, oh, oohh - Beethoven's famous fifth was never meant to sound like this. Working with just the bomp, bomp, bomp, bahh bit of the melody was always likely to be a bit limiting and The Ventures make a kind of cabaret band show of it repeating it endlessly like some dreaded disco disc. Tragically the middle eight section, which they had to come up with themselves, is so much better and would have made a far more interesting instrumental.

The band's version of Martin Denny's exotic *Quiet Village* soon restores matters to their previous excellence - all rippling guitars and warm electric piano with some incredibly jazzy licks from McGee to round the cocktail off. *Teen Beat* is certainly the best attempt at the Sandy Nelson sound since, well, since Sandy Nelson actually! It's not that the drum tone is close (it isn't) but the bass and lead guitars work together brilliantly to re-create that big-bottomed sound perfectly. Plus, Gerry delivers not one but TWO great solos.

There's a creditable version of the *James Bond Theme* with McGee skilfully capturing Vic Flick's menacing lead sound and Bob Bogle's upfront bass adding the main thrust of the number. Mel Taylor's drums provide a solid platform for *The Happy Organ* with Dave Baby Cortez' warbling organ being perfectly replicated for the corny but catchy tune. McGee again lifts the track several miles with his scorching solos.

Exodus is played straight with a deep, powerful lead and some symphony-style piano as befits the Ferrante & Teicher classic. *Quick Silver* is actually the *William Tell Overture* given a sensible, non-hysterical, over-the-top treatment which lends a little unexpected depth to the well known melody.

The party dips into MOR-land for straight versions of *Midnight In Moscow*, *Petite Fleur*, and *Walk In The Black Forest* and whilst all three are very tastefully performed it is chiefly their inclusion that yet again represents something of an Achilles heel for the band - they seem unable to completely resist the temptation to sink into the realms of comfort music. If only they had plugged in the fuzzbox or maybe tried their hands at a bit of thrash or grunge instead we would have been talking major triumphs.

Still, even as it stands, this is easily their best effort for decades which must surely be some cause for celebration.

Not exactly Wild Again then, but certainly still quite frisky.....

(Thanks to Gerry Woodage)

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

"JOY (PLAY THE CLASSICS) / LATIN ALBUM"

CD

(See For Miles C5 HCD638, UK; 74 mins)

*Beethoven's Sonata In C# Minor/ One Fine Day/ In A Persian Market Place/ Swan Lake/**Bach's Prelude / Peter And The Wolf/ Mozart Forty / Joy / Elise / Ravel's Pavane /**Mozart's Minuet / Melody Of Joy //**The Breeze And I / Yours / Begin The Beguine / Peanut Vendor / Spanish Eyes / Brazil / It's Impossible /**Poinciana / Green Eyes / El Condor Pasa / Delicado / Guantanamera / Cuando Calienta El Sol*

There's no doubt that those classical dudes knew how to knock out a beezer tune, not half. If The Ventures had recorded them in the sixties they would have been a treat. Loud, disrespectful and irreverent, '62 would have probably given us Mozart Mash, in '63 it would have been Ravel Twist, maybe Surfin' Swan in '64, Fuzzy Fine Day in '65, and In A Psychedelic Market in '68! Alas, this was recorded in 1972 by which time The Ventures had already lost the plot.

This may be regarded by many Ventures die-hards as one of their best albums of the seventies - fairly, I guess (the rest were mostly worse) - but there is no getting away from the fact that The Ventures sound like a bunch of emasculated session musicians lost in a welter of strings, harpsichords, and pedestrian brass arrangements. If you are going to tackle classical melodies then, in my book, you should either be striving for high art or taking the outrageous route à la Nut Rocker and Saturday Nite At The Duckpond. To reduce these wonderful melodies to soulless, MOR fodder is the worst possible option and does the composers themselves a genuine disservice.

The Latin Album arrives almost as a relief - well, for a while, it is. After you have listened to them plod through the first few tracks you are not quite so sure. Nokie Edwards may have been back with the band but he seemed just as prepared to mellow out as the rest of the guys. It comes as something of a shock to realize that even Edmundo Ross would probably have put more life into these Latin perennials than The Ventures! When, at last, the tempo is upped for Spanish Eyes, Nokie steps out with one of those breathtaking solos of his that restores some of your faith in the band. Brazil returns us to the plod, but thankfully It's Impossible switches us to credit again, its stark acoustic lead lending the attractive melody some feeling. Now this is more like it! Poinciana is actually moderately exciting for The Ventures have actually taken the trouble to come up with an idea (the scrubbed rhythm guitar backing)! Green Eyes sees us back on the snooze trail until someone prods Nokie for another of his "how does he do that?" solos, whilst his work right throughout Delicado is similarly mind-blowing.

If only this record had been made with the idea of transporting these melodies into a R&R framework the results might have been quite staggering. Instead its basic MOR values end up smothering what little life is present and the lingering feeling is that an awful lot of talent has just been wasted. Can we get back to the '60s stuff now, please?

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES "FLIGHTS OF FANTASY / THE VENTURES IN SPACE"**CD**

(See For Miles C5HCD644, UK; 56 mins)

Mighty Quinn / Innermotion Faze / Bonnie & Clyde / Walking The Carpet / Flights Of Fantasy / Soul Coaxing / Green Light / Cry Like A Baby / Fly Away / Love Shower / Summertime Blues / Scarborough Fair // Out Of Limits / He Never Came Back / Moon Child / Fear / Exploration In Terror / War Of The Satellites / The Bat / Penetration / Love Goddess Of Venus / Solar Race / The Fourth Dimension / The Twilight Zone

THE VENTURES "BEST OF POPS SOUND / GO WITH THE VENTURES"**CD**

(See For Miles C5HCD642, UK; 63 mins)

Kyoto Doll / Hokkaido Skies / Blue Chateau / Scat In The Dark / Koyubino-Omoide / Sukiyaki / Ginirono-Michi / Reflections In A Palace Lake / Ginza Lights / Forbidden Love / Wakareta-Hitoto / Kirino-Kanatani / Motherless Child / Kimioto-Itsumademo // Green Grass / Ginza Lights / These Boots Are Made For Walkin' / Frankie And Johnny / Ad-Venture / Monday, Monday / Good Lovin' / Eight Miles High / Escape / Sloop John B / Go / California Dreamin'

Blimey, these things breed like rabbits! No sooner have I finished reviewing the latest brace of Ventures twofers from See For Miles when another pair arrive! Despite the four year gap between *Flights Of Fantasy* ('68) and *The Ventures In Space* ('64) their similar extra-terrestrial themes make them an intelligent coupling. The decision to reverse the chronological order of appearance is also the right one, because not too many albums could successfully follow the mind-blowing *In Space* set.

As Gerry Woodage so rightly points out in his notes, **Flights Of Fantasy** was an important release at the time, following, as it did, the band's worst album of the sixties - *Million Dollar Weekend*, with its weak and premature attempt at harnessing the band to MOR. Something of a damage limitator was required, and *Flights Of Fantasy* lost no time in signalling the return to a tougher sound with the inclusion of fuzz guitar on the opening *Mighty Quinn*, as well as on *Green Light* and *Summertime Blues*. The best news though was the band's four (five if you count the doctored version of the previously released *Psyched Out* appearing here as the album's title track) original compositions. The new material, sometimes including trendy studio techniques such as phasing, all displayed a new found maturity and suggested a viable alternative direction to MOR. Sadly the band's, by this time, customary duffer was present in the shape of *Bonnie & Clyde* but this was more than made up for by the inclusion of the gorgeously melodic *Soul Coaxing*. A solid version of *The American Breed's Green Light* and the recruitment of *Blue Cheer's* muscle-flexing arrangement of *Summertime Blues* set the seal on a fine return to form.

So what can you say about the legendary **In Space** album? Given this distance it is so easy to forget just how radical and pioneering it was in 1964. There just had not been anything quite like it before and it justifiably put the band briefly at the cutting edge of rock while pushing out the frontiers of what was possible still further. *He Never Came Back* for example had such a whomping beat and clanging, metallic sounding, guitars that it could almost act as the blueprint for *Led Zeppelin* some five years later. Whilst *The Bat*, with its strange wailing sirens and acid-cutting guitars, could be something that Syd Barrett might have concocted for *Pink Floyd* on one of his better days. Choc full of imaginative sounds from the eerie to the chilling, and from the ghostly to the haunting, there simply is not a more adventurous and thrilling album. Together these two LPs make one wonderful CD.

Frankly I find the **Best Of Pop Sounds** to be a disappointing choice. It harks back to the bad old days when Ventures compilations were inevitably put together by David Bowie fans making their choices by throwing darts at titles pinned on the office wall. True, there are some nice melodic tunes here such as *Blue Chateau* and *Kimito-Itsumademo* - and *Reflections In A Palace Lake* is undeniably a work of tremendous beauty. However, there are also a lot of boring ones like *Hokkaido Skies*, *Forbidden Love*, *Kirino-Kanatani*, and *Wakareta Hitoto*. Without other outstanding Japanese tracks such as *Yoshora No Hoshi* and *Black Sand Beach* this clearly cannot be the **BEST** of Pop Sounds. I am sure that it must have

been tempting to pick this simply because the tapes and artwork were conveniently available but, personally, I do not think that is a good enough reason to repeat the errors of the past.

1966's **Go With The Ventures** was never a completely satisfying album. Gary Lewis' Green Grass is a bouncy, tuneful opener, even if it is just a bit of lightweight froth. Much better is the band's own Ginza Lights - but we have already had that on Best Of Pop Sounds! These Boots Are Made For Walkin' is predictably atrocious, and their You Really Got Me treatment of Frankie And Johnny is sadly lacking in imagination. Side two was always far superior with a raunchy version of The Rascals' classic Good Lovin', a solid re-creation of The Byrds' chilling Eight Miles High and, at last, a genuine original classic in Danny Hamilton's Escape. For me Sloop John B noticeably fails to catch the magic of The Beach Boys version whilst Go is little more than a cheeky rip-off of Chuck Berry's most memorable riff. Major solace is to be found however in the band's masterful interpretation of John Phillips' California Dreaming. Wilson's haunting rhythm and Edward's soulful lead combine to claim this evocative song as their very own. I am a bit puzzled as to why the original sleeve has not been used, and while I am carping about packaging, I would also point out that the picture that claims to have been on the reverse of The Ventures In Space - wasn't. As for this CD, well, I guess it's okay and maybe as a cheap sampler for the band's Japanese Pops material it has its uses. Looking at some of the other high-class See For Miles Ventures re-issues though, this is probably not one that you need to have at the top of your list.

Dave Burke

SURF GUITAR '96 CD SINGLE

beautiful blasters! Imagine a front line of Dick Dale, Booker T., and King Curtis. These guys are close! In fact they play together so tightly that they could record in a telephone kiosk. *Silent Night* blazes forth in a manner you could not have conceived of before hearing this. It even has a trumpet in the line-up giving this rocker a nice touch. Equally superb are the two other tracks, both by guitarist Tom Rafferty, a talented composer and arranger. When the Beat Poets, who hail from Scotland and only recently celebrated their tenth anniversary, brought out their first LP *Totally Radio* a few years back, I rushed out and bought a copy having seen it praised highly in Pipeline and I was not disappointed. It was (and is) great! Now I have their first CD EP. Please do not make it too long before you bring out that next CD album guys!

Grant Gall

(16 Thorncliff Gdns, Strathbungo, Glasgow G41 2DE)

VIBRASONIC

"INTO SUNSHINE" CD single
(YEP! YEP-5CDS; UK; 16 mins)

Into Sunshine (v) / *The Sea Of Stars* / *If I Were A Rich Man* / *Into Sunshine [phase mix]* (v)

Following their debut album, Vibrasonic have come up with a super little psych single with this vocal *Into Sunshine* coupled with a new version of their great atmospheric guitar instrumental *The Sea Of Stars*. As a bonus on the CD version we get a stunning Dick Dale & sitar treatment of *If I Were A Rich Man* and a version of the title track with extra fairy dust.

AT

(John: One Louder, PO Box 1NW, Newcastle, UK)

THE VENTURES

"SURF GUITAR '96" CD single
(Toshiba TODT3746; Japan)

Surf Guitar '96 (Let's Go mix) / *Surf Guitar '96 (Ryome Shirai mix)* / *Surf Guitar '96 (karaoke)*

The Ventures are, of course, very good at this kind of thing. Lay down a solid beat, bring in enough hooks to hang the entire contents of The Tate Gallery, add a sizeable portion of all-time great instrumental hits in medley form and, abracadabra, you have a smashing sounding disc! To them, it's easy; to us, it's unsatisfying. But I have to confess that I find it impossible not to be seduced by such an overwhelming chunk of nostalgia when it sounds as good as this does.

There is also a karaoke version so that you can add your own lead guitar should you so wish.

The Ryome Shirai mix is astonishing and works on the same basis as acid house / techno / jungle mixes do. The basic principal to bear in mind is that today's adolescent has a very short attention span. Therefore pick out the best small segment of a tune and repeat it ad infinitum so he learns that part of the tune very well and doesn't have to tax his brain with the rest. At first you wonder what on earth is going on but, once you have heard it a few times, it begins to make a kind of (limited) sense. At this rate I shall end up down the local all-nite rave dropping a few tabs. My parents warned me about this kind of thing. Dave Burke

I COSMONAUTI

"SURF'S UP! Vol.4 - featuring SEA STORM" EP
Hawaii 5-0 / *Matador* // *Sea Storm* / *The Cossack*
(Misty Lane MISTY-031, Italy)

Italian guitar four-piece I Cosmonauti make their debut with this fine EP. *Hawaii Five-0* is short and punchy, sharing a side with their own very fine (*Death Of A*) *Matador* which shows their surfin' sensibility to great effect. These guys know their reverb from their ravioli alright. Another tasty original is *Sea Storm* which is liberally laced with damped reverb picking from the second guitarist, very Chantays and very good. Closing out with an accomplished take on Jim Messina's high flying *The Cossack*, this EP will have you lusting for a full album's worth from I Cosmonauti. Misty Lane will have to move fast 'cos I'm sure the likes of Gee Dee will snap them up as soon as they hear this. Perhaps I will take that Italian trip after all, they must be dynamite live. Rock on Roma! AT
(Brian: L.A. Pascucci, 66-00168 Rome, Italy)

LOS MEL-TONES

"¡VIVA! LOS MEL-TONES!" EP
Poseidon / *Mirabel* // *Bach To The Beach* /
Showdown At La Jolla (Snatch 7; UK)

Canada's Los Mel-tones open up with a real surf belter in *Poseidon* which is a classic '60s style number liberally laced with guitar cascades and cymbal splashes. *Mirabel* is an altogether lighter piece that goes for mood over matter. Both tracks on side two are uptempo, *Bach To The Beach* with organ fills and *Showdown At La Jolla* introducing

THE VENTURES**"SWAMP ROCK / HAWAII FIVE-0"****CD**

(See For Miles C5 HCD 647; UK; 61mins)

Carry Me Back / Honky Tonk Woman / Muddy Mississippi Line / Jambalaya / Swamp Rock / Niki Hokey / Green River / Suspicious Minds / Catfish Mud Dance / Proud Mary / Gumbo / Plaquemines Parish // Hawaii Five-0 / Lovin' Things / Galveston / The Letter / Don't Give In To Him / Theme From A Summer Place / Medley: Spooky - Traces - Stormy / Medley: Aquarius - Let The Sun Shine In / Games People Play / I Can Hear Music / Dizzy

As pop finally became rock at the end of the sixties and fun and excitement were replaced by more grown-up concerns so, at the beginning of the seventies, The Ventures were exploring the possibilities that remained to them. With the continuing popularity of Creedence Clearwater Revival and with a Louisiana-born lead guitarist in tow, a rootsy round-up of the bayou's best must have seemed an obvious choice. So, banished were the wailing fuzz guitars and shrieking organs of teensville, to be replaced by the more adult sound of fiddles, harmonica, and accordion, whilst The Ventures stared out at us from the back sleeve in a stern-faced, grown-up way that suggested a new found maturity.

The problem with Swamp Rock though is that it falls between two stools. Neither rootsy enough nor rocky enough, it emerges from the oven like a half-baked hybrid. Perhaps if McGee had pushed the band into some wild zydeco stomps and into abandoning the stodgy brass arrangements that surround half of the tracks here, then a more distinctly Cajun target would have presented itself. I suspect though that Bob and Don are far too populist at heart to ever completely abandon the larger market and, in fairness, you have to agree that it is not until track eight arrives - Suspicious Minds - that a melody good enough to transcend both trends and genres finally emerges. So maybe they were right all along!

The rest of the tracks seem to slip by in a lazy, anonymous way. The Rascals' Carry Me Back is an ineffectual opener; The Stones' Honky Tonk Woman is redeemed only by its Keith Richards' style rhythm guitar; and, although Jambalaya sounds great with its added accordion, it is amazing how much of the melody seems to evaporate in McGee's hands. Gerry makes up for this though with his very own Gumbo - one of the few tracks that actually sounds as though it was born to be an instrumental rather than a tune minus the words. John Durrill's Plaquemines Parish makes for a surprisingly good, if low-key, finish - with James Burton guesting on guitar we are now told! Overall this is a mildly pleasing album but it never scales the heights of their sixties releases.

If Swamp Rock was a journey to the roots then Hawaii Five-O was like a visit with James Last! Drowned In Brass might have been a more appropriate title. Basically this sounds as though The Ventures were sat down amidst a dance band and told "see how you get on, lads!" Of course, what they actually did was to submerge their own distinct character under a sea of anonymous brass and woodwind until The Ventures had virtually vanished. Oh sure, Gerry, as lead instrument, cuts through the stodge and Mel remains defiantly audible, but The Ventures as an entity are entirely absent.

McGee does put in a couple of nice performances, the Classics IV medley of Spooky / Traces / Stormy allows him to stretch out and show off a few jazzy licks, although inevitably his best efforts are dragged down by the unambitious arrangements that surround him. Worse is to follow in the shape of I Can Hear Music - a celebratory anthem from the pens of Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich, and Phil Spector - which is dragged to the floor instead of rising joyously to the heavens. Even Dizzy, an immediately appealing piece of pop confection, is neutered by its plodding beat and bleating brass. When I say that the best track here is Theme From A Summer Place, the extent of the disaster that we are talking about is, I think, revealed. Even more puzzling is: why put this out when there remains so much better stuff in the vaults? *Dave Burke*

THE VENTURES

"THEME FROM SHAFT / THE HORSE"

CD

(See For Miles C5 HCD 651; UK; 63 mins)

Theme From Shaft / Peace Train / Thunder Cloud / Gimme Some Lovin' / Indian Sun / Deep, Deep In The Water (v) / Gypsies, Tramps And Thieves / Two Divided By Love / Tight Fit / I'm A Man / Never My Love / Cherries Jubilee // The Horse / Here Comes The Judge / Licking Stick - Licking Stick / Crazy Horse / The Gallop / Grazing In The Grass / Medley - Walk Don't Run; Land Of A Thousand Dances / Soul Breeze / Jumpin' Jack Flash / Choo Choo Train / Horse Power / Tip-Toe Thru The Tulips With Me

These two albums neatly bookend Gerry McGee's first stay with The Ventures. For some reason, perhaps because *The Horse* was thought to be stronger, the chronological order of the albums has been reversed. Anyway, we shall begin as ordered here with 1972's *Shaft*.

By the early seventies the band had lost much of their original identity, long gone were the busy arrangements of multiple wailing guitars and organs, their now slick and straight forward interpretations being sweetened instead by brass and strings.

The title track begins reasonably well, although compared to Isaac Hayes' original it does lack a certain soulfulness. Cat Stevens' *Peace Train* is given a very pleasant treatment with an outstanding performance from Mel Taylor and some nice country guitar touches. *Gimme Some Lovin'* begins brilliantly with Taylor's thunderous drums setting the scene for some dramatic fuzz guitar and swelling organ when McGee comes in with this weak, swampy-sounding lead that just seems so inappropriate for the track. He is much better on the other Spencer Davis track included here - *I'm A Man* - where he steams nicely using controlled feedback and plenty of distortion, ably accompanied by Mel who seems to be on top form throughout this album.

Most of The Ventures' originals are fairly dull affairs lacking distinctive melodies or inspiration, and I doubt that I could tell you how *Thundercloud*, *Indian Sun*, *Cherries Jubilee*, or the sole vocal *Deep, Deep In The Water*, actually went. The exception is *Tight Fit* which, while not especially melodically blessed, does at least have a good arrangement with swirling organ and fine use of strings. *Never My Love* certainly is melodically blessed but we do have a sense of déjà vu here (as well as being short changed) as it is taken from the band's earlier *Tenth Anniversary* set. *Gypsies, Tramps And Thieves* was always an outstanding number but somehow The Ventures lose the exuberance of Cher's original making it another so-so track. In essence this is the problem. In the sixties, Ventures versions of other peoples' hits were preferred as a matter of course because they invariably brought their own distinctive magic to them. Here they just seem like characterless versions and I'm sorry to say that in most cases I would pick the originals as being the preferred option.

1969's *The Horse* opens in powerful style with Taylor's pounding drums sharing centre stage along with McGee's urgent guitar licks and, straight away, The Ventures are back to their old trick of excelling the original. This is more like it! Pigmeat Markham's *Here Comes The Judge*, despite its novelty nature, is actually quite funky and McGee does a fine job of lifting it from its lowly origins. *Licking Stick - Licking Stick* is a tad ambitious. 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.

Danny Hamilton has been the author of many exceptional Ventures tracks and *The Gallop* follows on in that line giving McGee something meaty to get his teeth into. *Grazing In The Grass* is another high pedigree melody and for once George Tipton's chattering brass is used to good effect in backing up McGee. Pick of the bunch though is easily *Soul Breeze*. 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. *Jumpin' Jack Flash* emerges creditably and it is a surprise that The Ventures did not tackle more Stones material, with so much of it being rhythm based it would have suited Don

Wilson's style admirably. *Choo Choo Train* is another fine track with McGee's heavy guitar being aided by brass shouts and a powerful driving organ. Here the album runs out of steam, *Horse Power* relies far too heavily on an old Tamla Motown riff and *Tip-Toe Thru' The Tulips* soon uses up its slight humour value after a few plays.

The Horse is easily the best of the two albums and I would put it second only to this year's *Wild Again* as Gerry's best performance with the band. That is not to say that it equals their earlier material - it doesn't - but then neither is it the disaster that Nokie Edwards fans would have you believe it to be.

Shaft, on the other hand, is remembered solely for a few good moments and is probably best regarded as a free bonus.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

"WILD AGAIN - 2"

CD

(Toshiba-EMI TOCP50220; Japan; 54 mins)

Hurricane / Drums A Go Go / Bombora / Hot Doggin' / Calhoun Surf / Banzai Pipeline / Web Surfin' / Time Is Tight / Stop The Music / Spanish Armada / I Fought The Law / Hideaway / Cry For A Shadow / Blue Dawn / Peter Gunn

Now that the competition is hot once more, with the ever increasing number of great new young bands, it is satisfying to be able to report that our original heroes can still raise their game and come out top of the pile! Nor have the band lost their old ability to surprise us, for I doubt that anyone would have been able to predict that a Honeycombs instrumental would have been the lead track on a Ventures CD. The fact is though that, just as in days of yore, The Ventures have improved *Hurricane* beyond all recognition. What was an averagely interesting intro from The Honeycombs is transformed into a top line guitar stunner - it's almost as if they are able to sniff out the raw potential in a tune and mould it into something far greater.

The other important thing to say is that new boy Leon Taylor puts in a marvellous performance on *Hurricane* as he thunders around the kit in a very similar way to Mel - and Honey Lantree would have a job on to follow this! Son Leon is obviously very much a chip off the old block and plays splendidly throughout, so there are no fears for Ventures fans on that score. *Drums A Go Go* is given a respectful treatment, the standout performer for me on this is Mel's brother Larry Taylor who sits in for Bob on bass and contributes some delightful little licks.

The surprising thing about this CD is that Bob Bogle plays lead on no less than six of the fifteen cuts, and he takes the pole position on excellent versions of The Original Surfaris' *Bombora* and The Astronauts' *Hot Doggin'* - I must say that I never noticed just what a good tune this latter one was until now. Much the same could be said of The Raybeats' *Calhoun Surf* from the pen of Danny Amis, another high quality melody - maybe it's that The Ventures are able to bring out the best in these tunes? The Ventures dip into The Astronauts' bag once more for *Banzai Pipeline* on which Bob shares the lead limelight with the amazing Jeff Baxter who plays some stonking stuff at the fade-out - I can't believe that composer Henry Mancini had this in mind when he wrote it!

The timely titled *Web Surfin'* is a niftily little original from Messrs Wilson, Bogle, and Spalding with a mix of Dick Dale style lead and the sweeter Astronauts sounding variant - very tasty. Gerry McGee takes over on lead for the classic *Time Is Tight* with its familiar loping beat and catchy phrases, with Dave Carr's organ taking an unexpectedly restrained role. Gerry stays on lead for the following *Stop The Music*, which is more on the mellow side and rather disappointing melodically speaking.

Visitors to the Pipeline Convention this year were treated to an advance listen to *Spanish Armada* and *I Fought The Law*, featuring a wonderful guest appearance by none other than Duane Eddy! The choice of *Spanish Armada* - an obscure UK intro by Les Reed - was a real surprise, but what a terrific job Duane and The Ventures have made of it. The track is thoughtfully dedicated to the memory of Mel Taylor who had recorded on a solo album, and the track is correspondingly solid in the percussive department courtesy of Leon. The extended finale is just mind-blowing with Duane trading licks with Gerry McGee - what a treat! Sonny Curtis' *I Fought The Law* is given the classic Bobby Fuller treatment with raunchy rhythm guitar aplenty and Duane's deep twang providing the lead voice. Again, this is another triumph of co-operation as The Ventures and Duane blend perfectly - now, if only Hank had been there too.....

Next up is Freddy King's *Hideaway*, a solid outing for Gerry who is completely at ease thrusting home those bluesy licks, with even Dave Carr on organ actually managing to get down into the groove. Even though I am a firm Beatles admirer I have to say that I have never given Lennon and Harrison's instrumental *Cry For A Shadow* any credence at all. Yet here it sounds positively vibrant with plenty of

sparkling lead from McGee and a bright, rolling arrangement from Bruce Garry who also supplies the percussion for this track only.

Blue Dawn is one of the few (only?) classic originals that The Ventures produced in the early eighties. A Wilson, Bogle, and Bob Spalding composition, the track features Spalding on lead on what is a super tune, the band play it very tightly on this re-recording, and it is undoubtedly one of the CD's highpoints.

Peter Gunn is, of course, one of your standard climaxers and is guaranteed to have me boppin' from the moment it starts. There's no sax on this version but Bob Bogle and Jeff Baxter make up for it by exchanging some fiery lead guitar, and my only complaint is that it is way too short.

So another great return from The Ventures, let's hope that the sequels keep coming!

DB

THE VENTURES

"BATMAN / TV THEMES"

CD

(See For Miles CSHCD 653; UK; 63 mins)

Batman Theme / Zocko! / Joker's Wild / The Cape / 00-711 / The Man From Uncle / Secret Agent Man / Hot Line / Vampcamp / Up, Up And Away / Get Smart Theme / Green Hornet '66 // Charlie's Angels / Medical Centre / Startrek / Streets Of San Francisco / Starsky & Hutch / Baretta's Theme / Hawaii Five-O / SWAT / Police Story / MASH / Police Woman / Nadia's Theme

THE VENTURES "NEW TESTAMENT / MORE GOLDEN GREATS"

CD

(See For Miles CSHCD 652; UK; 73 mins)

Good Mornin' Captain (v) / Testament / Free / Oye Como Va (v) / Wild World / Katana / Whole Lotta Love / What Is Life / Novios Para Siempre / Spirit / She's A Lady / Pesado // The Good, The Bad And The Ugly / Mission Impossible / House Of The Rising Sun / More / Torquay / Love Is Blue / Classical Gas / Taste Of Honey / Green Onions / Grazin' In The Grass / Raunchy / Theme From Summer Place

I have been avidly awaiting the UK release of the **Batman** LP for some time. Not only because it was such a good album and featured an unusually high proportion of originals from the band, but also because the version put out in the Japanese box sets suffered so badly from distortion and muffled sound. The big question then is: have SFM improved matters? We have the answer by track three, *Joker's Wild*, which waxes and wanes in volume and alternates between sounding muffled and then clear. *The Cape*, *00-711*, and *The Man From Uncle* also bear less obvious but occasional flat spots. However, overall the SFM issue did not seem to suffer quite so badly as the Japanese version.

Musically this is a fascinating collection of sounds and themes. There are no great new melodies here, it's more a case of weaving hooks and riffs together and extracting the maximum mileage from them with clever arrangements and then sprinkling a little magic dust in the form of studio technology. Take *Hot Line* for example. Its tune really consists of about ten repeated notes but it is wrapped up in such a delicious arrangement. The tik-tik beat, a bit of morse code on keys, Bogle's driving bass, Wilson's cutting rhythm, one scorching lead from Edwards and, hey presto, you have a wow of a track.

It seems to me that the real talent of The Ventures was not one of getting a quart into a pint pot, but of getting a quart *out* of a pint pot! Every idea is exploited to the full, nothing is wasted, for, with a little imagination, there is another new original waiting to see the light of day. In essence *The Cape* is just a slowed down version of the *Tequila* rhythm, two bass notes and an answering phrase, plus the sound of billiard balls being ground together! *Vampcamp* could almost be a prototype

riff for the backing track to a heavy metal record and hey, isn't *Zocko* really *Drums A Go Go*? The absolute gems are *007-11* (*Secret Agent Man* in disguise?) with two knockout riffs in one track, and *Up, Up And Away* which features a beguiling rhythm from Don Wilson as well as a proper tune. In fact this album could almost be seen as a sequel to the celebrated *In Space* LP for it is similarly fertile in imagination and creativity.

The idea of teaming Batman with the **TV Themes** album certainly seems to be a good one on paper. Musically though the LP was about as barren as its partner was fertile. Recorded in the seventies when The Ventures had already been edged out of the serious rock market and sensed that the only option they were left with was the disco sound of young America. Hence this is full of stodgy beats, wah-wah guitar, farting moogs, and the most leaden string and brass arrangements as The Ventures ended up sounding like a soulless Issac Hayes. There is the odd moment to enjoy: *Charlie's Angels* is strangely revealed to have something of a catchy tune, John Hunt's flying solo in *Medical Centre* which almost (but not quite!) makes up for the excruciatingly piercing tone he adopts throughout the LP, and *Nadia's Theme* which is alone in seeming to have some kind of heart and feeling to it. Ultimately this is about as memorable as the TV programmes which it celebrates, which probably says it all.

As a concept **New Testament** was perfect. With a fresh decade dawning and music promising to deliver an even greater revolution than it had done in the sixties, The Ventures needed to throw off the recent memory of MOR albums and their old sixties identity if they were to capture a seventies audience. A new beginning was precisely what

The Ventures needed. As commendable as this was, their decision to base the new style almost exclusively on Santana rather negated their bravery somewhat. Mike Gutierrez and future Mel Taylor replacement Joe Barile were drafted in on conga, timbales and bongos etc. to complete the transition. In case the point was missed they even included *Oye Como Va*, a Santana top twenty hit. The problem was that there was already one Santana who, at the time, had a few better tunes plus a whole lorry load of spiritual bullshit. There wasn't enough room for another. They certainly didn't go for half measures either, just about everything here has Latin-American percussion bolted onto it regardless of whether it is appropriate or not.

Regrettably the tension inherent in Led Zeppelin's *Whole Lotta Love* is virtually dissipated by the treatment, likewise the fragile *Wild World* could have done without the heavy handed Latin feel. Best moments are *Testament* (although it's a pinch from *Light My Fire*), *Spirit* - McGee seems so more at home on what is basically a funky R&B backbeat; Paul Anka's tuneful *She's A Lady*, and the Booker T-ish closer *Pesado* featuring lots of tasty little touches from John Durrill on organ. Nice concept then, but it does seem to promise more than it actually delivers.

More Golden Greats is very much a mixed bag gluing together old tracks, new tracks, and a couple of let's-have-another-go-at-so-and-so tracks. That said, it has to be confessed that it has its moments. For one their brand new take on *Torquay*, which bases its arrangement on a tympani tattoo and a slice of Ramsey Lewis-ish piano. Curiously it is very like the sound that the Fun Boy Three and Bananrama concocted for *It Ain't What You Do It's The Way That You Do It* decades later. The re-tread of *Raunchy* is less successful, its ponderous beat dragging the tune down a little. Of the new tracks *Classical Gas* and *Love Is Blue* are both knockout tunes and very well handled by The Ventures, whilst *The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly* and *Mission Impossible* are also dealt with skillfully - the latter being a lot more listenable than U2's recent mediocre version. The rest are the familiar tracks originally drafted in for a bit of title strength.

There are too many good things on *More Golden Greats* to allow you to write it off, despite the frustration of having to have yet another copy of *The House Of The Rising Sun*, etc. Still, when taken in conjunction with *New Testament*, it has to be agreed that together they are good value and that this is a decent coupling of a pair of underheard albums. DB

THE VENTURES

"PLAY SCREEN THEMES"

CD

(Hallmark 306752; UK; 57 mins)

*Chariots Of Fire / Snows Of Nagano / Memories Of Love / Oh Pretty Woman / Never Ending Story /
Unchained Melody / After Midnight In Shinjuku / Stand By Me / Axel-F/Miami Vice Theme /
Follow Your Heart / The Gremlins Rag / One / Ghostbusters / St Elmo's Fire / Arthur's Theme /
What A Wonderful World*

Sometimes The Ventures amaze me, and not always in the musical sense. Here they are licensing their material out to bargain basement labels (this retails at £2.99) when only a short while ago they were expecting their loyal fans to fork out over twenty quid for the same CD. In fact this Hallmark CD is better value than its Japanese counterpart because it contains not only the complete Major Motion Picture Themes CD but also an additional four tracks from Flying High, another Japanese only release. Frankly, you get the vague feeling that you have been had. Surely, too, licensing material at this price level can do the band no good in the long run? What all this means though if you haven't got a copy is that you now have an opportunity to pick up a real bargain.

The Major Motion Picture Themes CD was always one of their best Japanese releases of recent times, mainly because the tunes are good and mostly immediately recognisable. The Ventures make a thoroughly decent job of just about everything here; *Axel-F* is particularly impressive for its burning McGee solo and catchy theme; *One* has a nice jaunty feel to it and features Dave Carr's organ well to the fore; John Parr's *St Elmo's Fire* retains much of its stirring, uplifting quality, while Christopher Cross' *Arthur's Theme* still languishes in its somewhat wistful way; Bob Bogle makes the most of his outing on lead on *What A Wonderful World* - take away the synth backing and it could almost be a track from their second eponymous album - very nice indeed. This, of course, is not to be confused with the rockier material that the rejuvenated Ventures are currently putting out, it's more of a cross between MOR and AOR, but it remains a highly enjoyable amalgam just the same. If I just didn't have this feeling that someone, somewhere, owes me twenty quid.....

DB

THE VENTURES "TELE-VENTURES - The Ventures Perform The Great TV Themes" CD

(EMI 7243-8-53738-2-4; USA; 67 mins)

*Hawaii Five-O / Secret Agent Man / Blue Star / The Twilight Zone / The Man From Uncle / Dick Tracy /
Get Smart Theme / Batman Theme / No Matter What Shape / Action / Green Hornet Theme /
Mission Impossible / Theme From Star Trek / Storefront Lawyers / Medical Centre / Police Story /
Song From Mash / On The Road / Streets Of San Francisco / Police Woman / Baretta's Theme /
Theme From Charlie's Angels / Nadia's Theme / Theme From Starsky & Hutch / Theme From Swat*

Now this is a bit more like it - somebody at EMI actually using a bit of imagination. Ron Furmanek and Steve Kolanjian have taken the formerly rare 1976 Canadian issued The Ventures Play The TV Themes LP and added a further 13 tracks from various sources to complete this CD of TV themes. Another nice touch is that there are two commercial breaks in the shape of *On The Road* and *No Matter What Shape*, both of which began life as the theme music for Alka Seltzer adverts!

The only bad news is that the original TV Themes album is a bit of a duffer. Recorded when disco was the big thing, everything seems to be laced with wah-wah rhythms and funky keyboards, played with stodgy beats and coated with formula brass and string arrangements. Worse still is the lead guitar sound which is switched to maximum pierce throughout - when the guitarist sustains a note you can almost feel your dental fillings begin to rattle! Still, never mind, once again you can thrill to the familiar tunes of your favourite TV programme such as *Charlie's Angels* and *Starsky & Hutch*, whilst you remember how bloody awful they all were.

Easily the best track is *Nadia's Theme* - a good tune actually played with feeling, so much so that the guitarist thankfully forgets to engage pierce or wah-wah mode. The good news is that all of the tracks have been remastered and so the sound quality outstrips that of both other companies currently engaged in Ventures re-issue programmes. In particular you should note that there are four tracks culled from the band's great *Batman / Spy* album which, unlike the Japanese CD version, sound absolutely wonderful. And that is the real attraction of this CD - take a listen to the beautiful *Blue Star* or the spooky *Twilight Zone*, neither have ever sounded better.

Rarity seekers should note that *Dick Tracy* is a slightly different version to the one which appeared on the Legendary Masters collection, a rather improved one too I would say. Certainly a release that will fill a hole in many people's collections.

DB

THE VENTURES "PLAY GUITAR / PLAY GUITAR VOLUME 2" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 654; UK; 75 mins)

*Raunchy / Tequila / Memphis / Walk Don't Run / Pipeline / Wipe Out / Let's Go / Out Of Limits***THE VENTURES "PLAY GUITAR Vol. 3 / PLAY ELECTRIC BASS Vol. 4" CD**

(See For Miles C5HCD 655; UK; 78 mins)

Secret Agent Man / Diamond Head / No Matter What Shape / A Taste Of Honey / La Bamba / Red River Valley / Lover's Concerto / Shotgun / I Hear A Symphony / Papa's Got A Brand New Bag

In 1965 this was a brilliant idea. Using vinyl as an additional teaching aid to the traditional text book methods meant that you could actually HEAR what a specific chord sounded like as well as seeing the chord shape in a book. Better still it meant that those with sharp enough ears could actually learn primarily by ear. Clang! - so that's how an A chord sounds; clang! - a G chord; and clang! - a D chord; add a B and an E chord and hey presto, you can play Tequila! The Ventures dubbed the idea "guitar phonics" and provided leadless, bassless, and rhythmless passages on the disc so that you could provide the missing element while also dreaming of being Nokie with the old acoustic that Uncle Fred had given you last Christmas.

Such was the popularity of The Ventures at the time that the first instructional album even made the US top hundred! However, thirty odd years later things have moved on. Presumably if you were gonna learn guitar you already did it or gave up by now, and if you still did want to take it up then video has added the extra dimension of moving pictures to the equation which must make this idea second best in today's instructional aids market. No, this is more likely to appeal to guitar playing fans who will see it as a bit of a kariokee opportunity to play along with their heroes. If this is the case then bear in mind that most of the tracks are shortened and repeated with different elements omitted and sometimes taken slowly to aid the novice player. There is also the voice of the unnamed instructor to contend with on some tracks.

For the most part though, this will be wanted by the brand loyal obsessives anxious to have everything and anything connected with The Ventures. For these ultra-committed types this is a very nice package, and for the cost of just £4.99 (plus £1.50 p&p in UK/Europe) See For Miles will send you a neat 44 page booklet (approx 245 x 135mm) containing the diagrams and other instructional information that came with the original LPs. For those really only wanting to know if there is any actual music on these CDs worth buying them for then the truthful answer is probably: no. Volume 4 may look especially enticing as it features mainly tunes that The Ventures did not otherwise record but, in all cases, the tunes are treated in a fairly pedestrian manner as, I suppose, befits a project like this. To sum up then I would say that these are chiefly for completists and ultra keen kariokists.

Dave Burke

#53
Pipeline 40 [1998] 37-38

THE VENTURES

"STARS ON GUITARS"

2CD

(Recall SMDCD 178; UK; 60 mins; 54 mins)

*Miserlou / Penetration / Oh Pretty Woman / Comin' Home Baby / Cruisin' Machine / Stand By Me /
 Have You Ever Seen The Rain / Hey Paula / Runaway / Lipstick On Your Collar / It's My Party /
 Unchained Melody / Maria Elena / Johnny Angel / Save The Last Dance For Me / Rhythm Of The Rain /
 Gold Finger / Chariots Of Fire / St Elmos Fire / Axel F/Miami Vice Theme //*
*Medley: Walk Don't Run - Perfidia - Lullaby Of The Leaves / Apache / Furi Furi 65 / Diamond Head /
 Wipe Out / House Of The Rising Sun / Slaughter On Tenth Avenue / Pipeline / The Cruel Sea /
 Hollywood Punk / Telstar / Secret Agent Man / Kyoto Doll / Paint It Black / Walk Don't Run 64 /
 Medley: Perfidia - Bumble Bee - Besame Mucho - Rap City - The Letter - Comin' Home Baby -
 Journey To The Stars - Walk Don't Run / Hawaii Five-O / Caravan*

Interested parties should look carefully at the track listing above because an earlier press release from this company suggested a different selection altogether. There must have been a sudden re-think by the compiler or a sudden conversion to the title strength ideology because what seems to have happened is that many of the lesser or unknown titles that were to have been used have now got the chop. Instead Recall have opted to fill the entire second disc with live performances from the nineties. This of course means that they can now not only boast a multitude of well known titles in the listing but also an arsenal of tunes most closely associated with The Ventures and the RI idiom.

As we know to our cost after an awful lot of naff compilations from the past, relying on title strength is not necessarily the best way to go about putting together a decent collection. Here, for example, the title track itself has been axed, a major attraction I would have thought as it is an excellent medley and not currently available elsewhere on CD. Still, it is difficult to argue that this 2CD set at mid-price is not good value. All of the selections on CD1 are drawn from the band's eighties and ninties studio recordings, beginning with Chameleon from 1980 right through to Pops A La Carte from the mid-nineties.

There are a lot of good things here too, although please note that this material was cut prior to the band's recent rejuvenation and so we do tend to be talking about ploddingly efficient rather than inspired excitement. That said they do smoulder a little on Comin' Home Baby and Penetration, while Runaway and Lipstick On My Collar both bring an appreciative tap to the tireddest of feet.

CD2 focuses on live recordings from '90 and '93 and offers a bargain opportunity to hear exactly what we have been missing with the band's absence from these shores. Live the band just seem to flower, listen to the astonishing guitar fireworks on House Of The Rising Sun, Bob's phenomenal bass work on Wipe Out, Don's dynamic tic-tic pulse on Pipeline and, of course, Mel's marathon showcase Caravan. Will we ever see them over here? Let's hope so. Meanwhile you can make do with this. *Dave Burke*

(Kindly supplied by CDC&R, PO Box 182, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG6 7XD.)

THE VENTURES "WILD THING / THE FABULOUS VENTURES" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 662; UK; 54 mins)

Wild Thing / Fuzzy And Wild / Sweet Pea / Wild And Wooly / Wild Child / Summer In The City / The Pied Piper / Wild Trip / Hanky Panky / Wild Cat / How Now Wild Cow / The Work Song / Needles And Pins / Runnin' Wild / Eleventh Hour / The Cruel Sea / Scatchin' / Tall Cool One / Only The Young / Journey To The Stars / Fugitive / Ravin' Blue / Walkin' With Pluto / The Pink Panther Theme

THE VENTURES "THE LONELY BULL / \$1,000,000 WEEKEND" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 663; UK; 58 mins)

Telstar / The Lonely Bull / Mexico / Calcutta / Apache / Never On Sunday / Tequila / Green Onions / Percolator / Red River Rock / Let There Be Drums / Last Night / What Now My Love / Georgy Girl / Ode To Billie Joe / Sunny / Respect / To Sir With Love / Music To Watch Girls By / Groovin' / Windy / Sealed With A Kiss / Uptight / Yesterday

These two couplings are very much opposites. The first sees The Ventures at the top of their game, whilst "The Lonely Bull" and "\$1,000,000 Weekend" is a knowing pairing of their two dullest albums of the 60s. It's easy to see why "The Lonely Bull" was a disappointment back at the beginning of '63, it was their first album to depart from their all-electric guitar sound. Instead we had organs, trumpets, mandolins, and acoustics aplenty. There was also the vague feeling that this was not the real Ventures. Too mellow, too sweet, and maybe too many session men too. A big production though with big hit tunes that sold by the lorry load. Even so it still has its fair share of enjoyable moments.

Re-creating Joe Meek's Tornados sound must have given them a few headaches, but this is a formidable attempt with harps, celestial sounding guitars, and a huge cinemascope-like organ making a more than acceptable substitute for the absent clavoline. Other distinctive "sound-characterised" hits were not quite so successfully coped with. Sandy Nelson's percussive wall of sound on "Let There Be Drums" is reduced to a mere drum solo, and "Red River Rock" misses not only Johnny Paris' growling sax but also the rock'n'roll heart of The Hurricanes. "Green Onions" doesn't quite match the R&B swagger of Booker T but does have a dirty, distorted guitar sound of its own to recommend it, whilst "Last Night" benefits from an improved Ventures' arrangement of the number.

From this distance it is easy to view "\$1,000,000 Weekend" as more of a miscalculation than any thing else. As Gerry Woodage says in his notes, it is not that it was a bad album, more that it was the wrong album at the wrong time. To Ventures fans it signalled that the band were about to prematurely abandon guitar R&R in favour of this mellow mood music. It is a pleasant album in a low key way and it is easy to let it just wash over you as mood music does so well. But there is barely a flash of inspiration to be found. Even Otis' downright angry "Respect"

though there were tracks like the amazing "Running Wild" which showed that The Ventures were now also constructing multi-layered creations with many different sounding guitar parts. The Ventures suddenly sounded like a bunch of fresh-faced sonic explorers, adding a dash of surf guitar

sounds more like an apology than the emotional tirade it was written as, while Stevie Wonder's joyous call to the dance floor "Uptight" has little of the original's passion. Catchy tunes like "Windy" and "Georgy Girl" fare best because in essence they are of a light frothy character and are suited to this kind of treatment.

Despite my rather negative feelings about these albums I have to confess that I did enjoy hearing them again - certainly more than I had expected to. If your taste is normally on the mellow side then this package could well appeal to you.

"Wild Things!" is the perfect antidote to an overdose of saccharine. Loud, brash, irreverent and beguiling, it is really The Ventures' heavy metal album way before the term was even coined. Originals such as "Fuzzy And Wild" and "Wild Child", with their lashings of fuzz guitar and wailing Mosrites, were easily the heaviest trip around in '66 and helped provide the sonic ingredients for psychedelia and other wayward excesses soon to follow. A generous six originals from the band, some lightweight fluff such as "Sweet Pea" and "Hanky Panky" - suitably stiffened up with Mel's pounding drums - and some decent pop tunes like "Summer In The City" and "Wild Thing" itself, make this a delightful set right from beginning to end. Strangely it preceeds "The Fabulous Ventures" on this CD putting the two LPs out of chronological order for some unknown reason.

"The Fabulous Ventures" is certainly no less of a success than its companion here. Appearing just after their celebrated "In Space" album and immediately prior to their knockout success with "Walk Don't Run Vol.2", the LP was an important staging post between the two. In some aspects it continued the space theme featuring tracks like the eerie "Eleventh Hour", the breathless space trip of "Journey To The Stars" and "Walkin' With Pluto" - a track featuring unusual guitar effects and sounding as though it might even have been composed in outer space! On the other hand

here, a touch of fuzz there, a twist of distortion, a touch of compression and god knows what else as they continued their quest for new and exciting sounds.

So, two wonderful LPs on one CD. You could hardly do better as far as I am concerned. *DB*

#56
Pipeline 42 [1999] 36-37

THE VENTURES

"NEW DEPTHS"

CD

(GNP Crescendo GNPD-2259; USA; 69 mins)

Hurricane / Drums A Go Go / Bombora / Hot Doggin' / Calhoun Surf / Banzai Pipeline / Web Surfin' / Time Is Tight / Stop The Music / Spanish Armada / I Fought The Law / Hideaway / Cry For A Shadow / Blue Dawn / Peter Gunn / Kanari Kiteru Koi (vocal by The Vice Girls) / Flower Of The Sun / Axel F. - Miami Vice / Trailblazer / Wipeout 2017

GNP gave a USA release to The Ventures' Japanese rockin' rebirth album "Wild Again" with a couple of the softer tracks lifted and some bonus cuts added. The Japanese "Wild Again II" was a stronger set and this USA release includes its track list intact. With the addition of five bonus titles and availability at a sensible (i.e. non Jap import) price, this is one essential package. Let's hope that the sequels keep coming

Hurricane

What was an averagely interesting intro from The Honeycombs is transformed into a top line guitar stunner. Just as in days of yore, The Ventures have sniffed out the raw potential in a tune and moulded it into something far greater. New boy Leon Taylor puts in a marvellous performance on *Hurricane* as he thunders around the kit in a very similar way to Mel, Honey Lantree would have a job following this! Son Leon is obviously very much a chip off the old block and plays splendidly throughout, so there are no fears for Ventures fans on that score.

Drums A Go Go

This is given a respectful treatment, the standout performer being Mel's brother, Larry Taylor, who sits in on bass and contributes some delightful licks.

Bombora / Hot Doggin'

Bob Bogle plays lead on no less than six of the fifteen Wild Again II cuts, and he takes the pole position on excellent versions of The Original Surfaris' Bombora and The Astronauts' Hot Doggin'.

Calhoun Surf / Banzai Pipeline

From the pen of Danny Amis, The Raybeats track Calhoun Surf is another high quality melody and The Ventures bring out the best in such tunes. They dip into The Astronauts' bag once more for Banzai Pipeline on which Bob shares the lead limelight with the amazing Jeff Baxter who plays some stonking stuff at the fade-out.

Web Surfin'

This niftily little original from Messrs Wilson, Bogle, and Spalding has a mix of Dick Dale style lead and the sweeter Astronauts sounding variant - very tasty.

Time Is Tight / Stop The Music

Gerry McGee takes over on lead for the Booker T classic with its familiar loping beat and catchy phrases. Dave Carr's organ takes an unexpectedly restrained role here. Gerry stays on lead for the following Stop The Music, which is more on the mellow side and rather disappointing melodically speaking.

Spanish Armada / I Fought The Law

Both featuring a wonderful guest appearance by none other than Duane Eddy! The choice of Spanish Armada - an obscure UK intro by Les Reed - was a real surprise, but what a terrific job Duane and The Ventures have made of it. The track is thoughtfully dedicated to the memory of Mel Taylor who had recorded it on a solo album, and the track is correspondingly solid in the percussive department courtesy

of Leon. The extended finale is just mind-blowing with Duane trading licks with Gerry McGee - what a treat! Sonny Curtis' I Fought The Law is given the classic Bobby Fuller treatment with raunchy rhythm guitar aplenty and Duane's deep twang providing the lead voice. Again, this is another triumph of co-operation as The Ventures and Duane blend perfectly - now, if only Hank had been there too....

Hideaway

Freddy King's biggie is a solid outing for Gerry who is completely at ease thrusting home those bluesy licks, with even Dave Carr on organ actually managing to get down into the groove.

Cry For A Shadow

Lennon and Harrison's instrumental sounds positively vibrant with plenty of sparkling lead from McGee and a bright, rolling arrangement from Bruce Gary who also supplies the percussion on this track.

Blue Dawn

The Ventures' original cut of this was one of the few classic originals that they produced in the early eighties. A Wilson, Bogle, and Bob Spalding composition, the track features Spalding's lead on what is a super tune. The band play it very tightly on this re-recording, and it is undoubtedly one of the CD's highpoints.

Peter Gunn

This is, of course, one of your standard climaxers. There's no sax on this version but Bob Bogle and Jeff Baxter make up for it by exchanging some fiery lead guitar.

Kanari Kiteru Koi

The first of the bonus cuts, this Bogle, Wilson, Taylor, Spalding tune was given Japanese lyrics and so the modern, bubbling, "surfin' Japanese" instrumental track is fronted by the three Rice Girls (aka VIP).

Flower Of The Sun

From the same four composers, this has McGee and Bogle swapping lead lines on a punchy performance with a Japanese flavour.

Axel F. - Miami Vice

Dave Carr's keyboards recreate much of the original Axel F's electronic flavour whilst Gerry cuts loose on the Miami Vice section with its ZZ Top beat. This recording includes Mel Taylor on drums and was made for Major Motion Picture, a Japanese album of screen themes.

Trailblazer

This instrumental take of Kanari Kiteru Koi makes the inclusion of the vocal version of little more than passing interest. The Paint It Black electric sitar sound of the lead successfully recalls an earlier Ventures era.

Wipeout 2017

Originally recorded for an unreleased video, this is Wipeout for the new millenium. Mel Taylor provides the dynamic drumming, guest Paul Warren the flashy lead guitar. A stunning finale to a great set, shame about the title though!!

DB / AT

THE VENTURES "LET'S GO / COUNTRY CLASSICS"

CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 657; UK; 57 mins)

Memphis / Let's Go / More / El Watusi / Walk Right In / Sukiyaki / New Orleans / So Fine / Wipe Out / Hot Pastrami / Runaway / Over The Mountain Across The Sea // Panhandle Rag / Wabash Cannonball / San Antonio Rose / I Walk The Line / Wildwood Flower / I Can't Stop Loving You / Lovesick Blues / Steel Guitar Rag / You Are My Sunshine / Oh, Lonesome Me / Sugarfoot Rag / Born To Lose

THE VENTURES "ON STAGE / SURFING"

CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 658; UK; 62 mins)

Wipe Out / Journey To The Stars / Slaughter On Tenth Avenue / Caravan / Pedal Pusher / Apache / Bumble Bee / Driving Guitars / Medley: Walk Don't Run-Perfidia-Lullaby Of The Leaves-Yellow Jacket // Pipeline / Diamonds / Windy And Warm / Ten Over / Surf Rider / Changing Tides / The Ninth Wave / Party In Laguna / Barefoot Venture / The Heavies / Cruncher / The Lonely Sea

THE VENTURES "ENCORE! / LIVE AGAIN!"

CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 675; UK; 50 mins)

La Bamba / A Taste Of Honey / Secret Agent Man / California Dreamin' / Batman Theme / Man From UNCLE / Ginza Lights / Kimito Itsumademo / Yozora No Hoshi / 007-11 / Wipe Out / Blue Chateau // Hokkaido Skies (v) / Black Sand Beach / A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You / Woolly Bully / Ginza Lights / Sentimental Guitar / La Bamba / California Dreamin' / Taste Of Honey / Slow Sundown / Diamond Head

THE VENTURES "ROCK & ROLL FOREVER / ROCKY ROAD" CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 676; UK; 65 mins)

Honky Tonk / Last Night / Smokie / Rumble / You Can't Sit Down / Ram-Bunk-Shush / 20-75 / Guitar Boogie Shuffle / Raunchy / Soul Twist / Sleep Walk // Moonlight Serenade / Daylight / Temptation, Temptation / Superstar Revue / The Stroke / Stepout / Gotta Be Stronger

Another batch of Ventures re-issues from See For Miles to keep us fans poor but happy! First up is a pairing of 1963's *Let's Go* and **Country Classics**, although here they are presented in the reverse order of their original appearances for some unknown reason. Quite why The Ventures decided to dredge up a bunch of C&W tunes at a time when country music was neither hip, nor privileged with the kind of roots respectability that it enjoys today, is another one of life's little puzzles. But then The Ventures always seemed to go their own sweet way. That they managed to transform some tiresome old buckskins of tunes into fairly muscular rock instrumentals, with only the two melodious ballads - *I Can't Stop Loving You* and *Born To Lose* - displaying any of the cloying sentimentality that we have come to associate with those "good ole boys and bar-room gals" is all to their credit. In fact The Ventures seem even tougher than usual, with Mel's drums being well to the fore and Don's rhythm quite ferocious in its attack. Nokie clearly relishes being on familiar territory as he glides over the fretboard zipping out his mesmerising runs and licks, while Bob's bass pumps energy into the most staid of sagebrush serenades. Who would have believed that *Panhandle Rag* could sound quite so tough, *San Antonio Rose* so electric, *Wildwood Flower* so powerfully beat driven, or *Steel Guitar Rag* so gloriously rocking. In fact The Ventures are on top form throughout the whole album and display a sharpness and keenness that suggests that this may well have been a favoured project. It's country music with a pure rock'n'roll heart, and it's never sounded better to me.

Let's Go was always something of a mixed bag, some great stuff and a few dodgy ones too. *Memphis*

is a brave attempt but doesn't quite match Lonnie Mack's earthy, soulful classic, while the title track itself, with Mel's distant drums mixed somewhere in the background, was never going to stand close comparison with The Routers' big sounding, "recorded in an aircraft hanger" style percussion. When Mel was placed centre stage as on the ultra-dynamic New Orleans, he demonstrated that he could virtually carry the entire track on his own, his thunderous snare and bass drum combination providing the jet-thrust that powers the number along. Surprisingly it was the slower tracks that came off best here, Sukiyaki with its fragile melody and wistful sound proved a poignant treat, whilst Over The Mountain And Across The Sea, with its dual low and high guitar leads played in unison proved equally effective. Coming from a similar time scale these two albums sit comfortably together, and make for an excellent value CD.

I still remember buying **On Stage** for the first time in 1965 and expecting very little from it. Traditionally live albums were a shoddy, unsatisfying affair, usually best forgotten. Boy, was I in for a surprise! I think gob-smacked is the appropriate term. Never before had I heard anything like it - the opening Wipe Out was as clear as a bell and, thanks to the super polite Japanese crowd, extraneous audience noise was kept to a minimum (at least on side one it was) instead of drowning the music out. Well, okay, so we know now that the record company cheated a little by adding the audience afterwards, but still nothing can detract from the sheer power and class of these live performances. Journey To The Stars and Slaughter On Tenth Avenue never sounded better, and what with Caravan being the jewel in the crown - it was a full house! The band were so obviously at the top of their game, slick as a TV ad for a new car, and with the speed and energy of a top class athlete - at this time the best band in the whole wide world and the evidence was here - no question!

The band's 1963 album **Surfing** may seem a slightly odd companion but, of course, with most of their material now released other possibilities have run out. The band were certainly quick off the mark in assimilating the then burgeoning surf scene into their style, but the album opens uncomfortably with a wooden version of Pipeline and a fairly leaden reading of Jet & Tony's Diamonds. From there though it's up all the way, with no less than nine spanking band originals! Listening to them now the fascinating aspect is to realize how they were able to weave four, five or even six guitar parts, each playing a different riff, into one complete whole - sometimes with very little dependence on melody. In other words their real skill was in arranging and in being able to develop the most basic idea to its fullest potential. Check out Ten Over. On first hearing it is an almost bewildering assortment of sounds and guitar themes, none of which are especially inspired in compositional terms, and yet when blended together the effect is one of a strangely original and beguiling concoction which could hardly have come from anybody else but The Ventures. That is not to say that there are no worthwhile tunes here. Don's enchanting ballad The Lonely Sea is matched in its tranquility and heavenly sounding beauty by the band composition Changing Tides, and of course there is also Nokie's classic Surf Rider to enjoy once again. I have to conclude that together these two make another great value CD.

Blimey, this is almost too much! On Stage may have prepared us for how good The Ventures were live but the next double helping of stage performances from '66 and '67 really does, to borrow a phrase from that same timescale, blow your mind! They were of course at the zenith of their powers and, to borrow another well worn phrase, this time from no lesser dude than Shakespeare, "they did bestride the world like a collosus". Over the top? No, simple truth. **Encore** is so damn wonderful it brings tears to my eyes. The Ventures charge through the performance like an amphetaminated bull! Everything is taken at breakneck speed - try that old warhorse Batman. You could have played this to a bunch of London punks in the mid-seventies and they would have thought it was a great new band. There is so much aggression and energy about this CD that it is a wonder that it doesn't spontaneously combust!

Live Again may begin a fraction of a notch down from Encore in sheer excitement terms, but then you need a momentary breather from this hectic rollercoaster ride just to recover your senses. The needle is soon flashing in the red once again with the high velocity burn of Black Sand Beach and Woolly Bully with its extended lead guitar pyrotechnics. Look, if I was a rich guy, I would send each and every one of you a copy of this CD just to prove how magnificent, how awe-inspiring, how uplifting great RI can be. As I can't, make sure that you buy the bloody thing for yourself! One final word about Gerry Woodage's sleeve notes. I don't always agree with Gerry's opinions (but then, he doesn't always agree with mine!),

but his notes this time are perceptive and absolutely spot on. Well done, sunshine! Hang on, must play Diamond Head '67 again.....

AMAZING!!!

Here's the turkey!! Yes, we are nearing the end of SFM's re-issue programme of the US albums and this is a knowing pairing of what are considered to be the band's worst two albums. Of course the reason for this is that The Ventures' involvement in playing terms, particularly with *Rocky Road*, is strictly minimal. The line up for **R&R Forever** was Harvel Mandel on lead, Jackie Kelso on sax, Dave Carr on keys, Larry Taylor on bass and brother Mel on drums, with Don and Bob presumably adding rhythm but mainly taking care of production duties. Sure enough, it sounds great and in truth is a scandalously under-rated piece of work. We may miss Nokie or Gerry's distinctive and outstanding lead stylings - Mandel is a great guitarist but just doesn't have enough bite or flair - but together the band sound great. Mel's drums never flag, in fact the combined Taylor rhythm section builds an absolutely solid foundation, and with Kelso's greasy sax and Carr's piping organ added into the mix the early authentic rock'n'roll sound is convincingly re-created. Mandel too does have his moments. Check out *Guitar Boogie Shuffle* with its fast shuffle beat and reaching-for-the-sky guitar solo, as well as on the slightly Albatross-sounding version of *Sleepwalk* - Kelso's double tracked sax adding considerably to this latter track. A high quality album in definite need of an upward re-evaluation to my mind.

So is *Rocky Road* really that bad? Emerging in the mid-seventies, co-incidentally just as I was re-discovering my own instrumental heritage thanks mainly to Dave Peckett and the diabolical UK punk bands of those times (now lovingly fêted in the retro-glossies - as Rotten so accurately smirked "Ever been conned?" - and they still are). Funnily enough at the time disco was like the anti-Christ and The Ventures embracing it on *Rocky Road* was greeted by readers of *New Gandy Dancer* metaphorically jumping out of windows! Well, I think we may have been wrong about disco. Then I saw it as a moronic, repetitive beat - but detractors could make a similar comment about R&R I suppose.

In fact disco was a determined reaction on the part of the Americans, particularly black Americans, to keep the action on the dancefloor and away from the radical, and largely empty, politicising of white musicians of those days who, to a man, had ideas way above their own capabilities. Over the years I began to notice that some of this disco stuff actually had good tunes and, hey, try McFadden & Whitehead's *Ain't No Stopping Us Now* for a beezer track. Given six or eight pints even I could manage a stumbling kind of shuffle to this.

Having, I hope, made the case for disco I can tell you that **Rocky Road** is actually, shock, horror, pretty bloody good. Okay so The Ventures didn't do much else except to drop by and pick up their cheque, but the cream of the LA session mafia are here: Vernon Burch and Larry Carlton on guitar, Wilton Felder on bass and Tom Scott on sax to name just a few. The album opens brightly with Glen Miller's wonderful *Moonlight Serenade* - super tune, lovely treatment, and a trombone solo too! The part-penned by Bobby Womack tune *Daylight* is a corker. Even at over five minutes it doesn't overstay its welcome, the tune is anchored around a delightful guitar figure which, given a chance, would melt the heart of the sourest sceptic.

Superstar Revue features lots of swirling brass lines answered by some dirty guitar work, sweeping strings, and a not unpleasant girlie chorus chanting the title and "Woo-ing" in strategic places. Bob and Don even pick up a writing credit on *The Stroke*, again it's a good sound with a strong groove and plenty of tasty sax and ironically, as it has a chorus, you could almost describe it as a vocal track. *Gotta Be Stronger* is a nice blend of sweetness - strings and electric piano - and toughness. Listen to that butch guitar, braying brass and powerful beat. Did I say turkey? Well, this is one turkey that need have no worries about approaching Christmases!

If you are one of those fans who dismissed either of these two albums when they first appeared on the simple grounds that neither sounded like The Ventures that we expected, then I urge you to listen again. Judged on their own merits both of these albums are fine entries in The Ventures' body of work. Now if I can only remember where I put that medallion.....

DB

THE VENTURES "GOLDEN POPS / POPS IN JAPAN '71"**CD**

(See For Miles C5HCD 686; UK; 64 mins)

Kyoto Doll / Midnight Guitar / Scat In The Dark / Forbidden Love / Why Do You Mind / On A Narrow Street / Why / Sometimes I Feel The Longing For A Motherless Child / The Wanderer / Suddenly Someday / Wakareta Hito To / Reflections In A Palace Lake / Misty Night / To Be Together Again / Mata Au Hi Made / Hanayome / Naruto / Nagasaki Memories / Stranger In Midosuji / Daremo Inai Umi / Saihate Bojo / Nagoya Express / Electric Monsoon / Spring Of Love / Shietoko Of Hokkaido

Two Japanese Pop sets from 1970 and '71, both featuring the McGee led Ventures with keyboard player John Durrill also included. Predominantly in a relaxed, melodic mood, these recordings are mostly designed to soothe and please rather than to stimulate and excite. The sitar-sounding lead on the tuneful *Kyoto Doll* gets proceedings off to a good start, *Midnight Guitar* maintaining the standard with Durrill's clockwork-like keyboard setting providing a very colourful backdrop. The strangely titled *Scat In The Dark* also benefits from tasteful keyboard touches and a very fine performance from McGee, who seems to be in a reflective mood on most tracks. *Forbidden Love* and *Why Do You Mind* rely on acoustic guitar rather too much for my liking and, along with *Why* and the sombre *Motherless Child*, are not especially strong melodies. *Wakareta Hito To* (re-appearing from the band's first Pops set) does have a better tune but is exceedingly dull, although band original *Reflections In A Palace Lake* has all the right ingredients - gorgeous melody and a moving performance from McGee.

The first three tracks of *Pops In Japan '71* slip by quite pleasantly without too much to distinguish them, until the jaunty *Hanayome* arrives with some lively piano and a chipper little tune to wake you up. The acoustic flavoured band originals *Nagasaki Memories* and *Stranger In Midosuji* are both a cut above most of the home-grown Japanese material, without either being really exceptional. Easily the best of the originals are *Nagoya Express* - nice rhythm guitar and organ break on this - and the beaty *Naruto*. The Ventures must have thought so to because they retitled them as *Tight Fit* and *Thunder Cloud* and used them on their US *Shaft* album! The final trio of tracks slip by as painlessly and pleasantly as the first three had done, like wispy white clouds on a summers day - and, sadly, with just as little substance. I guess this is a nice package, especially to those discovering the band's Japanese material for the first time. However, if you are just dipping a toe into the water then I suggest that you would be better off starting with their previous Pops set or investigating their live Japanese material first. *DB*

THE VENTURES
"10th ANNIVERSARY ALBUM / ONLY HITS"

CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 680; UK; 68 / 70 mins)

Everybody's Talking / Sweet Caroline / Medley: Who'll Stop The Rain / Bad Moon Rising / Michelle / Good Morning Starshine / Bridge Over Troubled Waters / Eleanor Rigby / The Sounds Of Silence / Strangers In The Night / Those Were The Days / MacArthur Park / Medley: Blowin' In The Wind / Don't Think Twice It's Alright / Up Up And Away / By The Time I Get To Phoenix / Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head / Let It Be / Sugar Sugar / Never My Love / Delilah / Hey Jude / Spinning Wheel // Also Sprach Zarathustra / Medle: Hummingbird / Summer Breeze / Get Down / Soul Makoosa / My Love / Cisco Kid / Killing Me Softly With His Song / Oh Babe, What Would You Say / Yesterday Once More / Superstition / Last Tango In Paris / Duelling Banjos / Live And Let Die / The Morning After / Drift Away / Alone Again (Naturally) / I Can See Clearly Now / Finders Keepers / The Twelfth Of Never / Frankenstein / The Night The Lights Went Out In Georgia / Are You Man Enough / You Are The Sunshine Of My Life

THE VENTURES
"IN JAPAN / IN JAPAN Vol.2"

CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 684; UK; 68 mins)

Walk Don't Run / Perfidia / Lullaby Of The Leaves / Driving Guitars / Bulldog / Pipeline / Apache / Slaughter On Tenth Avenue / Walk Don't Run '64 / Bumble Bee Twist / Wipe Out / Caravan '65 // Cruel Sea / Penetration / I Feel Fine / House Of The Rising Sun / Out Of Limits / When You Walk In The Room / Besame Mucho Twist / Journey To The Stars / Rap City / Love Potion No 9 / Pink Panther Theme / Mariner No 4 / Yellow Jacket / Surf Rider / Diamond Head

THE VENTURES
"POPS IN JAPAN / POPS IN JAPAN Vol.2"

CD

(See For Miles C5HCD 685; UK; 60 mins)

Blue Chateau / Hallelujah / Sentimental Guitar / Wakareta Hito To / Tokyo Lights / Slow Sundown / Hokkaido Skies / Kono Tenohirani Aio / Rainy Pavement / Yokahama Nights / Black Sand Beach / Road To Somewhere / Max A Go Go / Koyubi No Omoide / Kiri No Kannatani / Koi / Blue Fountain / Ano Hito / Red Hot Sun / Aozora No Arukagiri / Kagayaku Hoshi / Kazega Naiteiru / In A Lonely City / Bombay Duck

THE VENTURES
"THE EP COLLECTION Vol.3"

CD

(See For Miles SEECD 498; UK; 71 mins)

Sentimental Guitar / Slow Sundown / Manchurian Beat / Tokyo Nights / Misty Night / Diamond Head (live 1978) / Stranger In Midosuji / Hallelujah / Kickstand / On A Narrow Street / Nagasaki Memories / On The Road / Max A Go Go / Bombay Duck / Forever And Ever (v) / Star Wars / Cantina Band / Close Encounters Of The Third Kind / Blue Sunset / Angel (v) / Swan Lake / Slaughter On Tenth Avenue (live 1978) / Kagayaku Hoshini / Koyubi No Omoide / Kyoto Doll / Yozora No Hoshi / Road To Somewhere

First a big tip of the hat to See For Miles for putting a pair of double albums out as a two CD package for virtually the same price as a single CD. That is a very generous gesture. The Ventures are very proud of their 10th Anniversary set, they put a lot of effort into its recording and it is a very polished set which also features horn and string arrangements by George Tipton. Gerry McGee leads the band which at this time also included the keyboards of John Durrill. It was aimed fair and square at the middle of the road market of the day, which was syrupy and very, very square indeed. There's no doubt that some Ventures fans regard this as one of the band's best - "a work of perfection with not a note out of place" - as the sleeve notes tell us. Well, if it's tidyness you're looking for, and music perfected to the point where nearly all of the excitement is wrung out of it then this, I guess, is the place to be. Mind you, it's not really as simple as that. As ever The Ventures are capable of having you shout "hurrah" at one moment, only to have you hold your head in despair the next. Eleanor Rigby, as Gerry Woodage rightly points, out is a minor classic with its chomping cellos, overwrought piano, and McGee's wonderful multi-toned lead. Trouble is that you could be excused for not even noticing it sandwiched, as it is, between routine versions of the Sound Of Silence and Bridge Over Troubled Waters. The main problem for me with most of these tracks are Tipton's arrangements. Strings and brass, with a little daring and imagination, could have brought a fresh approach to the band but, without exception, Tipton stays with what is staid and predictable. The result is music that Jimmy Young would have happily used on his Radio Two show of the sixties. "What's the recipe for today, Jim?" I can almost hear his cartoon mouse character Raymondo say at the end of each track. It's just not rock'n'roll, Jim.

Issued three years later in 1973 with Nokie returned to the band and with Joe Barile replacing Mel on drums, Only Hits, was produced by Joe Saraceno and again strings and brass are added to the band. Arranger Ben Benay does, however, use a little more imagination than Tipton and consequently for me this is a marginally more listenable collection. There is a faint touch of funk, instead of syrup, about most tracks and that is what makes the difference. I can't honestly say that there is anything really outstanding - maybe the late night reading of McCartney's lush ballad My Love, but that's about it. The rest is all fairly low-key stuff and pretty much disposable.

So what's the best antidote to a surfeit of MOR? A solid shot of instrumental rock'n'roll of the highest possible quality would be perfect - and that's exactly what we get on the double whammy of In Japan Volumes One and Two! Both albums were recorded during the band's peak 1965 year when power, drive and excitement came as part of the deal. Surely these albums must represent the absolute pinnacle of achievement for live instrumental rock. The sound is perfection, total clarity, and the band are in sparkling form from start to finish. Looking at Mel's tiny kit it is hard to believe that he was able to get such a thunderous sound from it - we have heard Caravan so often down the years that you can get almost blasé about it, but listen closely once more to his amazing performance and you feel exhausted just by the amount of energy that he instills into the number. The tactic of taking most tracks at breakneck speed, mainly on Volume Two, just adds to the surge of adrenalin that you experience when listening to them. It is especially gratifying too, to have an opportunity to hear so many of the band's less expected numbers such as Besame Mucho Twist, Rap City, Mariner No 4, When You Walk In The Room and Love Potion No 9 alongside the more played classics. That they turn to gold just like their better known companions makes it all the more satisfying. This is a wonderful, wonderful CD. Buy it and be dazzled.

The series of Japanese Pops albums that The Ventures had running in parallel with the live sets were very different in character. Whilst the live variety were like miniature molotov cocktails, each brimming with fiery instrumental rock'n'roll, the Pops series were far more sedate in character - almost like Shadows albums but, of course, minus Hank's distinctive lead voice. Far and away the best in the series was their first foray into the field which is partnered here with the rather less impressive volume two. The first collection, recorded in the States in 1967 is, however, still pretty muscular and could almost have been mistaken for a normal American release if it were not for the vaguely Oriental-ish sounding organ and the occasional appearance of eastern flavoured melodies. The use of acoustic guitar also tends to crop up more often, most notably on slow numbers such as Hokkaido Skies and Wakareta Hito To. There are quite a few standouts, most notably the knockout Black Sand Beach which could easily have been a US a-side, a fact belatedly recognised in the eighties when the number was resurrected by the band as Showdown At Newport Beach. Their own original composition, Yokahama Lights, is another corker. It has a rather menacing sounding opening phrase which is repeated throughout the track to good dramatic

effect, whilst on the more melodic side there is also the twin pinnacles of Sentimental Guitar and Blue Chateau. Volume two (Gerry reminds us in his notes that it should be "Number Two" but this reminds me too much of early toilet training!) kicks off briskly with the lively Max A Go Go, and stays pretty upbeat through Koyubi No Omoide and Kiri No Kannatani. The drawback here though is that the exclusively Japanese written melodies are simply not strong enough to lodge in the memory and whilst The Ventures do a thoroughly professional job on them there is only so much that can be done. Still, as a nice bonus to go with the far superior first volume you just cannot complain, plus there is the fuzz enhanced aggression of Aozora No Arukagiri to relish as well as the chirpy jog of Bombay Duck. Altogether these albums make a very nice package indeed.

The third in The Ventures' EP series, this is easily the most daring of the trio. Gerry Woodage's brainwave of focusing on Japan-only releases means that this is almost a rarities set, and there will not be many Ventures fans who are not able to add something new to their collections - plus there is a generous 26 tracks to enjoy! Top of the rarities list must be a pair of Don Wilson vocal performances from 1965 - Angel and Forever And Ever - although both were definitely recorded far earlier, probably around 1960. There's also the rather obscure On The Road, which is rather ponderous and unique in Ventures' terms as it features an uncredited whilstler harmonising along with the lead guitar. Kickstand may not be a too familiar title and may be better known to you as Go-Go Dancer from the A Go Go album, here with added racing sound effects. Swan Lake is an alternate take of the track that also appeared on the Classics album - Joy - a rather better version too, with a rougher sound, heavier beat, and less orchestration. Two live tracks - Slaughter On Tenth Avenue and Diamond Head - originally appeared on the band's live double LP from 1978, both featuring an on form Nokie Edwards on lead. Dancefloor strutters will be pleased to have two extended disco versions of Star Wars and Close Encounters Of The Third Kind, the former clocking in at 7.38 whilst the latter is a mere 6.28! One of the many highlights is Manchurian Beat, an often overlooked track from 1971 which actually sounds rather more like '67 or '68. As you would expect there is also a smattering of Japanese Pops tracks, some superior ones too in the shape of Sentimental Guitar, Slow Sundown, Kyoto Doll and, most especially, Yozora No Hoshi which is The Ventures at their very considerable best on a thrilling surf style number. The sole criticism I have to make about this collection is the occasional time warp shock that occurs when you suddenly switch from, for example, a Don Wilson vocal track from the early sixties to a discofied cut from 1978. The extreme change of styles cannot help but jar a little. That aside, this is a well taken opportunity to round up various odds and sods in one generous package.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES**"WALK DON'T RUN 2000"****CD**

(M&I MYCV3002; Japan; 52mins)

*Walk Don't Run 2000 / One Of These Nights / Black Is Black / Jewel / Mercy, Mercy, Mercy /
Wild Weekend / Kicks (V) / Keep Searchin' / Venus / Spindrift / Santa Cruz / Movin' /
Night Bird / California Sun / Proud Warrior / Bermuda / Mal-Funk-Shun*

The Ventures, of course, have proved themselves always ready to return to the scene of the crime. Whereas most bands have enough trouble coming up with one decent arrangement The Ventures have shown they can dream up umpteen. Back in 1964 it seemed an amazing trick for the band to re-visit their biggest hit and re-invent it in a way that was so radically fresh and imaginative. That the offspring of WDR would win not only commercial success, but also prove to be so enduringly satisfying that it would achieve a separate life from its parent is the biggest trick of all. I guess it begs the question, can they really do it again some forty years later?

I think the truthful answer is probably not. Down the years there has been the swamp tinged soul version of WDR featured on The Horse plus a disco-ish treatment in 1977 and, like both of those, WDR2000 manages to please without ever making quite the same leap of breathtaking brilliance as the '64 revamp. But to have the imagination, the continuing vision, and the sheer staying power to try is no mean feat in itself. So a reggaefied version of Walk Don't Run may not have been what most of us would have predicted or, indeed, requested, but it ain't half bad anyway. Taken at a brisk-ish pace with perky sax and a vintage '64 organ in support, it sounds something like what you might expect UK band Madness to produce had they been given the job. Somehow, it even has the whiff of "unexpected novelty hit" about it. Now if only some radio station or rogue film director would pick up on it.

So what of the rest of the album? As with the Wild Again and New Depths sets, it is a sensible blend of sixties vocal and instrumental material plus a half dozen or so new instros from the guys. Sixties instros are represented by Wild Weekend, a rather new take on this by adding handclaps on unexpected beats and adding a fresh sharpness to the lead guitar break, and Lee Hazlewood's Movin' which retains its customary tightness and benefits from McGee's slicing lead work. More surprising is the inclusion of jazzman Joe Zawinul's Mercy, Mercy, Mercy - a late sixties hit for Cannonball Adderley - which fits McGee's style like a glove and could almost have been drawn from The Horse sessions back in '68!

The one aspect that the sixties vocal hits have in common is that they suit The Ventures so well that they almost might have been written for them! Venus (not the Frankie Avalon tune but The Shocking Blue hit from '69) is perfect punky fayre with its scrubbed rhythm guitar opening and memorable organ riff proving ideal meat for The Ventures' beefy guitar sound. Also crying out for Venturisation is The Rivas' surf and sand anthem from '64 titled California Sun. Here the characteristically weedy sixties organ sound is lovingly re-created, sitting atop of Leon's pounding toms, with McGee's urgent lead work driving the band along in convincing style. Equally well chosen are Los Bravos' Black Is Black from '66 and Del Shannon's Keep Searchin' from '64. Again both are superior compositions, the former propelled by Bob's chugging bass line and the latter helped along by Don's swirling rhythm.

One vocal hit that remains a vocal is Kicks, a Paul Revere hit from '66 penned by the illustrious team of Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, and featuring the appealing voice of Nancy Sinatra. I know that this track will not sit well with devoted instrumental-only types, but I have to say that it is a thoroughly professional job of a good song and Nancy sounds great to me! She retains that kind of kitsch charm that made so many of her sixties recordings a modest joy, and this liaison with our guys works well for both parties.

Originals apart, the sole non-sixties track here is The Eagles' One Of These Nights from 1975. Never one my personal favourites by The Eagles, I have to say that The Ventures have worked wonders with it. Although keeping to the same basic arrangement, it's the magic fingers of McGee that throw new light on the song. He transforms what was formerly something of a dull plod into a platform for some soaring lead lines as he lifts the tune onto a higher plateau altogether. Superb.

That leaves us with the final and, most would say, the most important grouping - the originals. Four of these are from the Bogle, Wilson and Spalding team, namely Jewel, Spindrift, Night Bird and Bermuda. The first two feature Bob Spalding on lead, whilst Night Bird has Gerry on lead and Bermuda features

Bob Bogle in the driving seat. Jewel is a pleasant little number that glides past in a, well, pleasant way without really making too much impact. Next up is Spindrift, a tune the band previously cut back in 1982 with Nokie on lead. This is much stronger with Don's tik-tik speciality providing a solid background to the melody, although Don does not feature on this track! Gerry is on bass and Bob Bogle on rhythm but, whoever is doing what, it's a very fine original indeed. Night Bird does feature Don, but on muffled rhythm (it says here!). Quite what that means I'm not sure, but it is another pleasant outing with rather more bite than Jewel and boasting plenty of exquisite soloing from McGee. Bermuda is probably the least impressive of the four, with little melody to recommend it and perhaps too much intervention from Dave Carr's keyboards.

Added to those four are a further three originals, Gerry's Santa Cruz, Christian Wilde's Proud Warrior, and the Bogle, Wilson, Spalding, McGee, Taylor composition Mal-Funk-Shun. Santa Cruz is most notable not just for Gerry's customary superlative performance but also for Don's very crisp and upfront strummed acoustic which provides a strong rhythmic drive to the number. Proud Warrior was actually recorded in '95 and so features Mel on drums. Based fairly and squarely on Apache, it does manage to muster sufficient appeal of its own. It may be my imagination, but there seems a vague Japanese air about it too. Something of a grower I suspect. Mal-Funk-Shun sounds like the band having fun. A straight ahead rock'n'roller with a tangy pulse beat, some round the kit action from Leon, and plenty of hot licks from Gerry. Nothing very original but very likeable and enjoyable just the same.

Overall this is another very fine album from the band. In truth it is probably half a notch down from its two most recent predecessors, but that is because the standard of those is extremely high. Maybe there are not too many really great individual tracks - Wild Weekend, Spindrift, One Of These Nights and Venus are the highlights - but the sum total of the tracks makes for a satisfying whole. The sound quality is superb and this CD can only be seen as another successful step in the re-vitalisation of The Ventures.

Finally, can I just add that this Wild Again triumvirate has not only proved that the band can still convincingly cut the mustard, but also that Gerry McGee has finally seen off all those foolish fans who for so long have harboured lingering doubts about his ability to follow Nokie. And, I'm ashamed to confess, that once included me. These three CDs have made a believer of me!

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES**"V-GOLD"****CD**

(M&I MYCV 30001; Japan; 57mins)

*Walk Don't Run / Telstar / The Cruel Sea / Slaughter On Tenth Avenue / Yellow Jacket / Apache / Perfidia
 / Diamond Head / House OF The Rising Sun / Secret Agent Man / Manchurian Beat /
 Bumble Bee Rock / Pipeline / Wipe Out / Caravan / Hokkaido Skies / Kyoto Doll /
 Stranger In Midosuji / Reflections In A Palace Lake / Ginza Lights*

Another record company, another re-cut of the instro genre's top hits, another payday. I guess you can't blame The Ventures for wanting to top up the old pension funds and this is the easiest way to do it. To be fair these are all excellent performances in top quality sound - much better than their previous attempt for Tridex at the fag end of the '70s. One nice touch is that as far as possible (bearing in mind Mel's demise) the original personnel have been used on each cut - so Nokie returns on lead for 13 tracks, Bob on four, and Gerry on the remaining three. Pity they couldn't have got all three on just one celebration number - what an event that would have been! Additional musicians are Dave Carr on keyboards, Dino Soldo on sax and Greg Leisz on steel. Arrangements are kept faithful to the originals and, although to my mind none of the tracks actually kick their predecessors out of the water, most can sit comfortably alongside them.

The Cruel Sea and Diamond Head do work particularly well, benefitting from a heavy dollop of modern technology in the old technoflash sound department. Most improved of the lot are the handful of Japanese associated tracks clustered together at the latter part of the CD. Strange, but these do sound improved. Maybe it's just that I don't carry around quite so much emotional investment in these particular numbers. In any case, it's great to know that The Ventures can still kick the proverbial bottom - to still be rockin' to this degree in their sixties is an amazing achievement. Call me a cynic, but I can't help but expect a Stateside release of this before too long - with a few extra tracks, natch.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES "RUNAWAY - DON WILSON'S FAVOURITE VOCALS"**CD**

(M&I MYCV 30005; Japan; 42 mins)

*Runaway / Needles & Pins / Black Is Black / Keep Searchin' / When You Walk In The Room /
 Hats Off To Larry / So Fine / End Of The World / Caribbean / The Wind Blows East /
 Born To Lose / Steady As She Goes / Detroit City / Yesterday /
 I Forgot To Remember To Forget / I Can't Stop Loving You* all tracks vocal

There are a few sad people who insist that neither Don or The Shads can sing, but, of course, that is utter nonsense. Whether they make good vocal discs or not is the real question. Don is the owner of a perfectly adequate light tenor, his style being firmly rooted in the rather melodramatic ballad genre of the early '60s. Even when he sings up-tempo numbers such as Hats Off To Larry with its vengeful, even cruel lyric he sounds as though it's breaking HIS heart! The first 6 tracks, four recorded in '99 and the balance in '83, are fairly strong powerpop style treatments of well known '60s hits performed perfectly competently. After that The Fiestas' So Fine (a different version from that which graced their Let's Go album) brings a gritty R&B-ish quality to the proceedings.

From here on in though it's country more or less all the way, beginning with Skeeter Davis' End Of The World right through till the final track, Don Gibson's I Can't Stop Loving You, with steel guitar becoming ever more prevalent. This, along with Born To Lose, sound to be the same backing tracks as appeared on the band's Country Classics album from '63 with Don's vocal substituted for Nokie's lead guitar. Whilst talking about re-treads, it also seems to me that the instrumental versions of Follow The Sun and Black Is Black which appear on Walk Don't Run 2000 share the same basic backing tracks as the versions that appear here. Cheeky or what? For me, easily the most enjoyable of the country numbers is The Wind Blows East - a really fine song from the pen of Don's mother Josie. Don seems to appreciate the special quality of the song and turns in his best vocal performance of the entire CD.

So, it's an okay-ish disc, a mix of competent country and frisky powerpop but perhaps not an essential purchase, except for Ventures completists. Keep the day job Don, might be sound advice.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES**"V-GOLD LIVE!"****CD**

(M&I MYCV 30028; Japan; 63mins)

Walk Don't Run Medley: WDR, Raw-Hide, Shanghaied, Torquay, The Work Song, Mr Moto, Comin' Home Baby / Besame Mucho, Rap City, Green Hornet, Perfidia, Blue Moon / The Cruel Sea / Telstar / Black Sand Beach / Apache / Out Of Limits / Let's Go / Stranger In Midosuji / Reflections In A Palace Lake / Ginza Lights / Kyoto Doll / Paint It Black / Walk Don't Run '64 / House Of The Rising Sun / Slaughter On 10th Avenue / Hawaii Five-O / Wipe Out / Diamond Head / Pipeline / Caravan

The Ventures have now reached a point where they are going backwards. Whilst the rest of us get older and slower they, it seems, just get younger and faster! This is a cracking CD with The Ventures sounding better than ever. The set commences with a super medley stringing together a bunch of old favourites from the early days. Bob takes the lead on this, taking us right back to the authentic early style, and he still has that unique touch that makes tracks like Walk Don't Run and Blue Moon so heartwarmingly nostalgic to listen to. Next Nokie takes over the lead role while Bob switches to bass and we run through a selection of the band's timeless classics. Black Sand Beach and Out Of Limits work especially well - full of dramatic sounding rhythm, courtesy of Bob and Don, and with Nokie sounding as commanding as ever. Even that old warhorse Let's Go sounds fresh as a daisy, with Don leading the audience in communal clapping and hollering encouragement throughout the number, it all sounds great fun.

There's also some of the band's best Japanese material to enjoy - Stranger In Midosuji seems to grow in stature as time goes on, and Reflections In A Palace Lake retains all its aching beauty - whilst Don's frantic rhythm guitar on Ginza Lights has to be heard to be believed. There's no doubt that Leon Taylor has brought a lot to the band with his youth and energy. His presence is growing ever stronger and he's every bit as solid and dependable as his old man with Wipe Out and Caravan retaining all their customary power and excitement. Mel would be proud. Nokie has a ball on House Of The Rising Sun, throwing in all his memorable licks and runs, whilst Don runs out his superb tiki-tiki guitar on Walk Don't Run '64. A knockout live CD then, the rejuvenated Ventures sounding better than anytime since the sixties.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES "THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION"**2CDs**

(See For Miles SFM 1969; UK; 68/61mins)

Walk Don't Run '77 / Amanda's Theme / Warm Hearts / Papa / Nightly News Theme / Summer Concerto / I Will Never Leave You / Speeding Through Space / Really Something Nice / Don't Say Goodbye / Mizu Wari / Hollywood Punk / Tomorrow / Victoria Station / Springtime Love / I'll Be Yours Forever / The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise / How High The Moon / Suzukake No Michi / Kimi To Itsumademo / Hey There Sunshine (v) / Dick Tracy 2 / Beautiful Sunday (v) //

La Dernier Train De L'Space / Movin' / Last Tango In Paris / Prima Vera / Oh My Love / Haunting Memories / Theme From Airport '75 / Man With The Golden Gun / Wonderful Land Sun & Moon / Dance On / Things Have Got To Get Better (v) / Keep Japan Beautiful / Beautiful Sunday / Karelia / Minyo Disco North To South / Green Hornet Theme / Secret Agent Man / Ten Seconds To Heaven / Let Your Love Flow (v) / Storefront Lawyers / The Savage / Peter & The Wolf

Gerry Woodage has done an excellent job here. Given the opportunity of a deluxe 2CD set by See For Miles, he has taken the chance to mop up most of the remaining Ventures tracks that had still to make their digital debut and squeezed them into this superbly presented package. Looking something like a small hardback book and including a full 40 pages of text and photos, it is really just what your average Ventures fan would want to see.

Of course the problem with semi-rarity sets is that you are inevitably looking at titles, the music becoming almost of secondary importance. The majority of the picks here stem from the seventies when The Ventures were fairly rudderless, left wondering where all the big sixties sales had gone and uncertain about where to go.

Much of the first CD is taken up with the LP issued in Japan as "The Last Album On Liberty", sometimes known as "The Originals Album". The tracks were much lauded at the time, mainly because it was such a relief to hear that The Ventures could still produce something halfway decent. However, in these post "Wild Again" days we have come to expect so much more, and now they seem far less satisfying. Decidedly on the mellow side and featuring some acoustic leads as well as synth strings plus piano accompaniment from Dave Carr, the overall effect is of a pleasant late-night mood album. "Warm Hearts" has a particularly nice melody to recommend it but I'm afraid that far too many of the other tracks tend to drift into one because of the lack of an outstanding tune.

Reflecting the seventies there's also some dated wah-wah guitar to be heard, as on "I'll Be Yours Forever", plus there's the even more obvious disco styling of "Walk Don't Run '77". Best track by a mile is Joe Barile's "Hollywood Punk", vintage Ventures with lots of fuzz guitar and aggressive drums from Barile himself. "Nightly News Theme" has an appealing, almost space-like sound and "Speeding Through Space" benefits from Barile's rocksteady drums (again) and a fairly energetic performance from the rest of the band.

Particularly welcome are three very rare tracks from the mid-seventies Japanese compilation "Early Sounds". These are "How High The Moon" and "The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise" with Nokie performing some super Les Paul licks and, on the down side, "Suzukake No Michi" which is full of the most awful farting Moog sounds. The lovely "Kimi To Itsumademo" here features added female vocal chorus, whilst "Dick Tracy 2" is a slightly different arrangement to the version which appeared on the Legendary Masters CD. Two vocal rarities complete the first CD. "Hey There Sunshine" is a light, airy piece of sunny pop which sits nearby Daniel Boone's equally bright singalong hit "Beautiful Sunday", both of which are handled very well indeed.

The second CD pulls together some of the new-to-The Ventures tracks that slipped out amongst the Tridex hit re-recordings at the end of the seventies. These are versions of The Spotnicks' "Le Dernier

Train De L'Espace", The Astronauts' "Movin'" and The Shads' "Wonderful Land" and "Dance On". I have to say these all sound considerably better than I remember them, perhaps providing them with new surroundings gives them a fresh chance to shine. The same could be said of "Last Tango In Paris", a real atmospheric chiller with a powerful melody which often tends to get overlooked in its usual "Only Hits" setting.

We also have a handful of tracks - "Haunting Memories", "Airport '75", "Prima Vera", "Man With The Golden Gun" - which originally appeared as A or B sides on assorted singles, and then got buried away as the only new tracks on dodgy compilations of old material which often got missed by fans. In truth not many of them are worth getting too excited about, with most being bogged down in stodgy seventies arrangements with brass and synths. However, it's difficult not to admire the slick tempo changes on "Oh My Love", and it is nice to have these tracks collected together in one convenient place.

Considerably more rare is a version of The Spotnicks' "Karelia", although it's as dull as dishwater, and the rather more interesting "Sun & Moon" which has only ever been available on cassette before. There's a couple more breezy vocals from Don with a revival of The Bellamy Brothers' "Let Your Love Flow" and the Joe Barile composition "Things Have Got To Get Better", both good quality early seventies pop and the latter with all the potential of a huge hit had it got any exposure.

The CD rounds off with stereo versions of old fave rarities like the excellent "Storefront Lawyers", "Green Hornet Theme" and "The Savage" which may have appeared elsewhere but, so what, they're knockout tracks!

So, overall, this is a well thought out, well taken opportunity. The music may not be consistently great, but for a double rarities set - which is what it is in effect - it's not bad at all and should see most of us adding a few new tracks to our collection.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES "PLAY SOUTHERN ALL STARS - TSUNAMI" CD

(M&I MYCV 30093; Japan; 53mins)

*Hotel Pacific / Ali No Kotodama - Spiritual Message / Inase Na Locomotion /
Shulaba La Bamba / Erotica Seven / Paradise / 01 Messenger / Minna No Uta / Kibou No Wadachi /
Sonna Hiroshi Ni Damasarete / Anata Dake Wo - Summer Heartbreak / Tsunami*

This must be the worst ever Ventures cover art. Looking from behind, we peer through some young lady's open legs, The Ventures logo branded on her right buttock, whilst a plane in the background sky seems set fair for a penetrative course. This tasteless imagery seems more suitable for some brain-dead heavy metal band than for a band of The Ventures' age and stature. I swear sometimes The Ventures are their own worst enemy.

Thankfully the artwork bears no relationship to the music within. Hotel Pacific opens the account brightly, an upbeat number with plenty of outstanding lead guitar from Gerry McGee and a sprightly rhythm driven along by Leon Taylor in the drum seat. The following Spiritual Message is, as you would expect from its title, more subdued, but the most notable thing about it is that half of its melody seems to have been borrowed from Barbara Streisand's Woman In Love. Ummm. Not that this is anything to do with The Ventures themselves because all of the tunes are drawn from the catalogue of popular Japanese band The Southern All Stars - this being the second volume of their material that The Ventures have covered.

The tempo is soon picked up by Inase Na Locomotion which again finds the band in energetic mode, with Dave Carr adding some perky piano to speed things a long. Shulaba La Bamba has nothing to do with the Richie Valens classic but is actually a more funky, get down kind of number with a heavy bass synth line and some powerful rhythm work from Don. Erotica Seven features Don again on his surfing style tic-tic rhythm and some nice work from Gerry on lead, but I can't help thinking that the number is overpowered by Dave Carr's synthesizers in places. Paradise is a kind of stroll along number with McGee again shining on lead, for although the melody is never worth more than a decent b-side, his performance alone lifts it several notches.

01 Messenger finds the band in heavy rock mode with a dirty, bluesy lead line - McGee is again magnificent and for once Dave Carr sticks to a straight organ sound which sounds so much better than his dated synthesizer effects. With Kibou No Wadachi we find ourselves back in the land of the slight once more, and I can't help thinking that the performance is far better than the material actually deserves. In fact this is a criticism that can fairly be made on the entire set for while The Ventures, including Bob Spalding and Dave Carr, are immaculate throughout and the whole thing sounds wonderful - brilliantly arranged and performed - at the end of the day you are still left with a bunch of so-so tunes. It seems ironic that the band are probably now playing better and are technically more accomplished than at any other time in their career and yet seem prepared to record material that does not do them full justice.

Let's me make it clear though - judged anyway you like this is still a very good CD. I just feel that another in the Wild Again series, perhaps extending the formula to include more recent hits, would provide The Ventures with the kind of superior material that their abilities demand.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

"V-GOLD 3"

CD

(M&I MYCV 30092; Japan; 50mins)

*The McCoy / Pedal Pusher / Rawhide / La Bamba / Man From Uncle / Red River Rock /
Driving Guitars / Taste Of Honey / 2,000lb Bee / Yozora No Hoshi / Goldfinger / Batman /
El Cumbanchero / Let There Be Drums / Nutty / Ten Seconds To Heaven / Guitar Boogie Shuffle /
Honky Tonk Women / Bimini Bay / My Love For You*

When Alan gave V-Gold 2 a favourable write up a while back we had a letter from outraged Swedish Ventures fan Arild Petterson who bitterly attacked him for giving such crap a good review! So who is right? Is the V-Gold series just a lamentable excuse for the band to top up their pension funds, or are the guys really improving the classics we loved first time round?

I have to say that the opening The McCoy full took my breath away, as much with unexpectedness as anything else. Why should The Ventures select such a primitive and raw track right from the beginning of their career, probably the closest they ever got to Link Wray, to open what you would expect to be essentially a re-run of instro's greatest hits? The answer is that The Ventures are so contrary that you can never be quite sure what they are going to do. They remain an enigma, a law unto themselves, and you can never quite know how things will turn out. The McCoy is just great, as solid a slab of raw instro rock'n'roll that you could possibly hope for. And, talking of Mr Wray, we are also treated to a powerhouse version of his classic Rawhide with Nokie Edwards, who plays lead on 16 of the 20 tracks, sounding almost as angry and evil as Link himself! Sandwiched between these two we have another surprise choice: Pedal Pusher, which is almost as fresh and invigorating as the day I first heard it back in 1964.

The classics come fast and furious: La Bamba, Man From Uncle, Driving Guitars, A Taste Of Honey and, frankly, there is not a track that I do not rejoice to hear. Original arrangements are by and large kept the same but there is no doubt that the band have also brought something fresh to these tracks, whether it is modern technology, 40 years of experience or, as I tend to believe, mostly one helluva drummer in Leon Taylor. We can all argue about which, but there is no doubt in my mind that these are worthy recordings in their own right.

El Cumbanchero's guitars galore arrangement with its double counterpoint at the bridge is amazing, Ten Seconds To Heaven is another gloriously full, big-sounding joy, 2,000lb Bee remains fantastic with tons of depth and as aggressive as ever with Nokie having lost none of his sting! Bob Bogle takes the lead on Guitar Boogie Shuffle and, if I'm not mistaken, considerably ups the tempo so the number fair speeds along, upping the rewards to the listener at the same time.

Gerry McGee appears on The Stones' Honky Tonk Women sounding better than the band's original version, while on Bimini Bay - a lotta fun, almost reggae-ish Mel Taylor / Spalding / Bogle and Wilson original he shines like the Jamaican sun. Another original, My Love For You from the pens of Bob and Don, closes the CD and frankly both of these Ventures compositions are better tunes than anything on the Southern All Stars album. Thoughtfully arranged by Don Wilson and featuring Bob on lead who eventually makes way for an emotionally charged solo from Jeff Skunk Baxter, it is a lovely performance of a beautiful ballad.

Well, the earth certainly moved for me. I think you can say I'm with Alan on this one.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

"V-GOLD LIVE 2"

CD

(M&I MYVC-30122; Japan; 60 mins)

Medley: Walk Don't Run, Perfidia, Blue Moon / Walk Don't Run / Yozora No Hoshi / Nutty / The McCoy / Journey To The Stars / Mr Moto / The Ninth Wave / Slaughter On Tenth Avenue / Driving Guitars / Rap City / Jambalaya (v) / Do You Wanna Dance (v) / No Trespassing / My Bonnie Lies / Besame Mucho / Walk Don't Run '64 / Secret Agent Man / El Cumbanchero / Diamond Head - Pipeline / Caravan

These days The Ventures turn out new CDs like there was no tomorrow and, I guess, with retirement beckoning that's the reality of the situation. Still, we are lucky to have this rush at the end because the band, obviously anxious to spice things up as much as possible, are looking back over their catalogue to see what they can recruit from their illustrious past. So we have the welcome appearance of The McCoy from 1960 plus the following year's No Trespassing, both of which are tremendous. True, the former has recently been released as a studio recording and the latter is due soon on the band's V-Gold 4 studio set but hey, these are live and Don and Bob are smart enough to know completists will want to own both versions. There's also less hackneyed tracks like Rap City, My Bonnie Lies and Besame Mucho nestling amongst the usual staples, and while the cynics will reasonably say that this CD is chiefly a financial harvesting process, it's difficult to hold it against them when they sound this good.

Nokie takes the lead role on most of the tracks and performs with his customary flair and panache, while Bob takes over the front position for the opening medley with his appealingly distinctive style. Don contributes a couple of decent vocal performances, plenty of his celebrated tic-tic guitar, and also a spoken taking-care-of-business type personal endorsement of Aria guitars. Leon is brilliant throughout: rock solid, showy enough to make it interesting but restrained enough not to take over the whole show. What a marvellous successor to Mel he is.

Overall this is another class outing from the band and proves that The Ventures can still cut it in the 21st century. Long may they continue.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

"60's ROCKIN' CHRISTMAS"

CD

(M&I MYCV-30123; Japan; 45 mins)

Sleigh Ride / Snowflakes / Santa Claus Is Coming To Town / Jingle Bells / Jingle Bell Rock / Silver Bells / Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer / Winter Wonderland / Frosty The Snowman / Blue Christmas / We Wish You A Merry Christmas / White Christmas / Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree - Here Comes Santa Claus / The Christmas Song / Feliz Navidad

The Ventures' original Christmas album of 1965 is, of course, one of the intro world's genuine classics. So re-recording the tracks some 36 years later is something of a bravado move. The original running order of the first side of the album is retained but the one Ventures composition from side two, Scrooge, is given the chop and added are four new tracks. Sensibly they don't mess around with the basic concept of the album, sticking with the same borrowed arrangements that surprised and delighted us all those years ago. Instead they rely on the latest technology to make a fresh impact and, by and large, it works well.

Certainly the opening Sleigh Ride sounds even better than before, retaining all the charm and drive of the original but adding a digital gloss to the trip. Likewise Snowflakes loses nothing of the earlier version's haunting quality. Santa Claus Is Coming To Town does lose something of its tough Woolly Bully approach, and much the same could be said of Jingle Bell Rock which sounds more country Memphis than rock Memphis if you know what I mean. Perhaps not surprising as Nokie is back in the lead seat.

To be honest though this is mere carping. Especially as Silver Bells, Blue Christmas and White Christmas all sound as magical as ever. Naturally of most interest are the new tracks. Maintaining the concept, Winter Wonderland begins with the opening to Bulldog before speedily switching to a more traditional Christmas feel with festive sounding bells, and again Nokie's lead lends a subtle country feel. Runaway is borrowed as the introduction to Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree, which itself segues into Here Comes Santa Claus!

Working best of all though is Mel Torme's Christmas Song, a real seasonal classic, which is delicately handled, even if I did find that I really wanted to hear the whole of Home instead of just the snatch of intro utilised here. Surprise choice to close the proceedings is Jose Feliciano's Feliz Navidad, nicely spruced up with a touch of the La Bambas and including a brief vocal refrain as the guys *Wish us a Merry Christmas from the bottom of their hearts* and very nice it is too. Another highly successful project from the revitalised Ventures. I know spring is nearly here, but pass me the turkey and crackers just the same!

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

"HYPER V-GOLD"

CD

(M&I MYCV-30139; Japan; 48mins)

*No Trespassing / Rap City / Mr Moto / Ninth Wave / My Bonnie Lies / Stop Action /
 Movin' n' Groovin' / California Dreaming / Last Date / Torquay / Wailin' / Besame Mucho /
 Journey To The Stars / Blue Skies / Classical Gas / Sukiyaki / Paint It Black /
 The Creeper / Open For Business / Island Moon*

Umm, well The Ventures are obviously getting as confused as I am with numbering their volumes of re-cuts so here they've gone for "Hyper" V-Gold instead. What next I wonder, Ultra-Hyper V-Gold? And then perhaps Super-Ultra-Hyper V-Gold? Oh well, I guess it does make them easier to identify, although I would have preferred them to be taking on new material instead. That said, this is astonishingly good. Having done all of the obvious titles The Ventures have been obliged to move on to the less expected choices and the results are undeniably impressive.

No Trespassing opens and sounds nearly as dramatic as it did all those years ago, likewise Mr Moto is incredibly close to their original version right down to the femme chorus and is arguably improved by virtue of its modern technology. In fact an interesting debate could be had by arguing which title is improved and which is not. From my point of view most are not, but that it is close enough to even merit discussion is sufficient compliment in itself. Rap City doesn't quite have the frantic drive of the original, likewise Wailin'. Last Date sounds far more country than it did in '61, and even the wild solo in Stop Action has the faintest country edge rather than the metallic Mosrite toughness of the sixties original. Plus Don's rhythm is mixed way too low!

Torquay is one of those that could be said to be better than their sixties versions. It retains Don's powerful rhythm but adds a bit more whomp in the drums department. Leon's drumming is great throughout and he re-creates Mel's style perfectly with plenty of his own flair added in. However, Howie Johnson's style is another thing altogether, and on Blue Skies he does not quite capture Howie's effortless swing and those splendid, unmatched, rim-shots - who could? He's great on the drum showcase The Creeper too, although here the overall sound is less convincing - except if you're comparing it to the sixties stereo mix that is, which is atrocious.

The tracks deliberately feature the same lead guitarist who originally played on the title in the sixties, so Nokie features on all but three of the tracks. Gerry takes the lead on the later sixties recordings Paint It Black and Classical Gas, and also on the newly composed Island Moon which has a very pleasant relaxed South Seas feel to it. The only other new composition is Open For Business which features a brisk ska beat and a fine guitar solo from Jeff Skunk Baxter.

So then, it's another high quality bunch of re-recordings but, what I really want to know is, when are we gonna get Hyper Wild Again?

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

YOUR HIT PARADE 60'S

CD

M&I Records MYCV 30195; Japan; 65min

Twist Degli Amanti / One Way Ticket / Where The Boys Are / In The Year 2525 / The Sound Of Silence / Those Were The Days / Hey Paula / Rhythm Of The Rain / San Francisco / Sherry / Sinno Me Moro / From Russia With Love / Land Of A Thousand Dances / Both Sides Now / 13 Jours En France / Help / Exodus / You Only Live Twice / Slaughter On Tenth Avenue / Diamond Head / Caravan

The casual observer might think that there is a "proper" new Ventures' CD reviewed in most issues of Pipeline. Not so, with their re-recording of old favourites (V-Gold) and live material (V-Live) it just seems like that. In fact this is their first CD of (mostly) new material since 2000's Acoustic Rock. Even so, because three of the tunes have been recorded before on 1981's Sixties Pops, two on 1970's Tenth Anniversary Album, as well as the three old fave bonuses at the end, this does have a slight sense of déjà vu about it.

Despite that, it's clear that the Ventures remain in good shape. The opening track demonstrates the typically high production values involved and the sharpness of all those musicians taking part, and yet you can't help notice that there is a certain tameness in the lead guitar department. Where it should slash it slices, where it should scream it merely calls. Even though lead duties are shared between Nokie (eleven tracks), Gerry (seven) and Bob (three), on a casual listen you could be forgiven for thinking it was all the same guy! Perhaps it's just that high gloss production does lend a certain uniformity, even though the engine of the band - Leon, Bob, Don and Bob Spalding - fire along with horsepower to spare and are as tight and solid as Italy's back four are wont to be.

And talking of our European cousins, Sinno Me Moro translates as Tomorrow I Die and is from a 1959 film titled Un Maledetto Imbroglia (A Dirty Gamble) which starred Claudia Cardinale, and Twist Delgi Amanti (Lover's Twist) is from a 1962 film titled L'Eclisse featuring Alain Delon. Do we not bring you culture here? Mmm, maybe Don and Bob spend a lot of their time in LA art house theatres? Anyway, the former kicks off with a solid Yellow Jacket type rhythm and is a pleasant enough tune, although the best bit comes at the end when Gerry adds some great licks of his own manufacture. Sinno Me Moro, with Bob on lead, is a pretty piece of fluff but not much else. Bob's outing on 13 Jours En France is much better. With a great little chorus choc full of emotion, it suits Bob's no frills maximum impact style perfectly while Bob Spalding fills in with some great bass work. Surprise success of the CD must be The Beatles' Help. Nokie gives just a little country tinge to the lead, but the band provide the number with a determined drive that puts it fair and square into the rock arena, and with newcomer keyboard man Billy Mac providing a fine harpsichord-like foil to Nokie's lead it's a resounding hit!

Connie Francis' Where The Boys Are provides a nice change of pace for the band, with Nokie's lead letting the tuneful melody speak for itself. In The Year 2525 was always an atmospheric number and Gerry re-creates that sense of future mystery with his skilful lead, much aided by Bob Bogle's bass which wells up from the keyboard chords that dominate the background. Similarly the original wistful atmosphere of The Cascades' Rhythm Of The Rain is reproduced effectively, as is the optimistic warmth of San Francisco, while Joni Mitchell's Both Sides Now makes for a melodious recruit as an instrumental. Best of the lot though is Land Of A Thousand Dances, with Leon's drums thundering along and with Gerry tearing it up in choice fashion - now this really rocks! Overall then it's yet another fine piece of work from The Ventures, perhaps not quite the powerhouse tour de force I would like it to be, but there's still enough good stuff to keep me happy.

Dave Burke

#77

Pipeline 63 [2004] 50-51

THE VENTURES

SURFING

CD

Magic 3930396; France; 41min

Pipeline / Diamonds / Windy And Warm / Ten Over / Surf Rider / Changing Tides / The Ninth Wave / Party In Laguna / Barefoot Venture / The Heavies / Cruncher / The Lonely Sea / bonus tracks: Damaged Goods / The Ninth Wave (2) / Hawaiian Surfing / High Tide / Wild Night / Caravan

I'm quite impressed with the overall improvement in sound quality that Magic have been able to bring to their Ventures re-issue programme. This was particularly apparent on their recent re-issue of the band's Walk Don't Run Vol.2 album and, although not quite to the same degree, this too sounds improved when compared to the See For Miles issues as well as those within the Japanese box sets. Unfortunately I don't have too many of the American releases on One Way so I am not able to include those with my comparison. Generally the Magic issues seem clearer and sharper, less muddy, and small details such as the extra percussion used on Party In Laguna and the fact that Mel is doubling the tempo on his bass drum at the end of Ten Over suddenly emerge from the swamp. Interestingly at the beginning of Pipeline Mel is on the right channel on the SFM and Japanese issues, and yet is on the left on the Magic version where he also seems marginally less constrained within that single channel (or maybe it is just that he sounds less in the background). This is a bit of a puzzle as I doubt Magic would have been able to re-mix the masters, so if anybody is in a position to compare this with the One Way release it would be interesting to hear their comments.

As for the music, well, Surfing is not amongst their best releases but sits comfortably towards the lower middle range of their sixties albums. The covers come off worst with Pipeline sounding far too restrained and Diamonds seeming distinctly wooden, although our American cousins may not have thought so at the time as they did not have the benefit of the Harris / Meehan original. The strength of the album lies in its numerous originals although, with the exception of the two rather beautiful ballads, Changing Tides and The Lonely Sea, they are mostly based on riffs or what were then unusual guitar sounds. Check Barefoot Venture, which is really just an arrangement hung around an assortment of guitar sounds. Mind you, they are great guitar sounds! Similarly The Heavies is just dun-da-da-dada-dun with lots more terrific guitar sounds strategically inserted. The Cruncher, a drum feature for Mel, is mostly disappointing when compared to the kind of thing that Sandy Nelson and Ritchie Podolor were then creating, and The Ninth Wave seems like a respectable try for the Jet Harris sound and it is present here in both its album and single versions. Easily the best melody is Nokie Edwards' Surf Rider, although it had already appeared on the band's previous album under the title of Spudnik.

The added bonus tracks are fair enough and Hawaiian Surfing, a track lifted from the unissued Ventures In The Vaults Vol.2 material, was originally intended to appear on the Surfing album. Wild Night (actually Party In Laguna shorn of its novelty voices) and Caravan first appeared on the Bobby Vee Meets The Ventures album, the latter's hectic country-ish Les Paul-like licks launching what was to become the band's traditional closing number at live shows for some forty years.

Still can't figure out, though, why experienced engineer Eddie Brackett and producer Bob Reisdorff didn't fix the distortion on Mel's tom toms.....

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES**J-ROCK SUMMER WIND****CD**

M&I MYCV30333; Japan 2005; 68min

Sea Side Bound / Bang Bang Bang / Louisiana / Time Machine Ni Onegai / Nanimio Ienakute Natsu / Shonan My Love / Runner / Natsumatsuri / Julia Ni Heartbreak / Megumino Hito / Romanhikou / Mary Ann / Asia No Junshin / Jam / Koiwoshita Yoruwa / Den En / Itsumademo Kawaranu Aiwo / Naminori Johnny

This is being touted in Ventures circles as the band's best album for some time and they are not wrong. It has more vim and vigour than the average CD by a bunch of 25 year olds, how The Ventures muster this level of energy after a life-time in the recording studio I just don't know. There's no doubt that much of the fire emanates from Leon Taylor who is never less than excellent, and sometimes very excellent indeed. But his performances are matched by Bob, Don and Gerry, as well as Venture in all but name, Bob Spalding.

You will not be familiar with any of the tunes as they are all of Japanese origin and, if there is a fault, then it is the universal one of average material. However, The Ventures make the most of everything here. There's not a trick they miss and the arrangements and performances elevate the material beyond its true worth. Who said you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear - it seems that The Ventures can and do. The opening *Sea Side Bound* races out of the speakers like a greyhound with Bob's bass hurtling along behind Leon's exhilarating drums and Bob Spalding's flying lead work, and before you have time to draw breath the band are banging into *Bang Bang Bang* which reminds me a little of *Peppermint Twist* - only faster. *Louisiana* is not the unissued track of the same name, but a solid chunk of guitar rock'n'roll with Bob Spalding's aggressive lead pointing the way amidst handclaps and a rock steady rhythm while a subtle second lead underpins the main theme adding extra weight and character to the tune. *Time Machine Ni Onegai* concludes the opening quartet of Bob Spalding led items, and it's just as vigorous and full of fire as its predecessors - Bob seems to think he has something to prove, and he does too.

Nanimio Ienakute Natsu is the first of six tracks to feature Gerry McGee on lead, a more restrained but no less impressive track with some emotional depth which Gerry finesses perfectly. Bob Bogle takes the lead on *Shonan My Love*, and his direct, less fussy, style rings out clear and true - although I would guess that it's most likely Bob Spalding who is responsible for the impressively showy solo. *Runner* has Bob Bogle on lead again (in fact he takes pole position on four tracks on the CD) playing in a most brisk, forceful way, and the track also features some discreet synth work from Chris Turner. *Natsumatsuri* is dominated by Leon Taylor's powerful drumming as he switches between a nice little pattern played on the shells of his drums, and then adds in all sorts of creative touches on snare and toms before contributing a brief fill and a head-for-home four four beat that really cracks along. Gerry is back on lead for *Julia Ni Heartbreak* and, despite its sad title, it fairly rocks up a storm and I particularly loved the way Gerry works in a nod to *Lullaby Of The Leaves*.

Megumino Hito is interesting for its contrasts. Chris Turner features an excruciatingly vulgar synth in one part of the tune, but then makes up for it by adding a sublime organ bridge later on. Similarly the central guitar riff is a real patchwork plodder, but after the bridge it switches to a lovely warm, summery theme - it's about four tunes in one really. *Romanhikou* has a delightful feel to it. From its opening bass run, surrounded by a glockenspiel-like synth to Bob Bogle's evocative lead work, it builds up bundles of charm which I see no need to resist.

Jam and *Itsumademo Kawaranu Aiwo* both feature Nokie Edwards on lead and, while his performances on both are of high quality, the tunes themselves struggle to register, most of their appeal stemming from Leon's ever-crisp drumwork. In fact the CD does fade a little towards the end - mainly because of the average nature of the material although the performances remain of sky high quality. All in all though it's another triumph for The Ventures - a band that now has no less than four el supremo guitarists at the front of the pack, most bands would be delighted to have just one.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

YOUR HIT PARADE 2

CD

M&I MYCV 30384; Japan 2006; 51 min

*The Green Leaves Of Summer / Charade / Plein Soleil / East Of Eden / Jailhouse Rock / Blue Hawaii /
Live And Let Die / Fools Rush In / Melody Fair / Love Story / Rock Around The Clock / Diana
Somewhere Over The Rainbow / The Good, The Bad & The Ugly / Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head /
Tonight / Goldfinger / California Sun*

I knew I was in trouble with this as soon as I heard the opening Green Leaves Of Summer. This is a tune that the band treated with due respect back on their 1961 Colourful Ventures album, allowing the sensitive melody to speak for itself within a stark, bare arrangement that perfectly drew out its beauty. Here it's given a rather unnecessary reggae treatment and drowned in too much additional percussion, a plodding four-four cowbell being particularly irritating. Henry Mancini's Charade opens with the familiar James Bond chord sequence for some reason and is as over-dressed as its predecessor and, bloody hell, there goes that sodding cowbell again. Plein Soleil is a novelty-like tune which sounds to be of Italian origin with a somewhat trite middle-eight and, again, submerged in tambourines with a guiro also drafted in to add extra colour.

East Of Eden is an uninspiring melody with an unattractive lead guitar sound and some '70s style synth that lends a dated feel to the track. Jailhouse Rock is not a number I would have suggested for The Ventures, but it does move along with some urgency and there is some decent soloing to enjoy from either Bob Spalding or Nokie Edwards. Rock Around The Clock is further hallowed ground upon which it might be unwise to tread and, alas, so it proves to be. It's almost impossible to replicate the wonderful swing of The Comets, and even the normally dependable Leon seems to lay back while the rest of the band play with little apparent conviction.

Perhaps I'm being too harsh, for there are a few good points. Somewhere Over The Rainbow glides along quite nicely without too much added clutter, and there's even a cute little music box segment which fits in pretty well. West Side Story's Tonight is given a similar treatment with only maracas added to the rhythm. It has a very attractive guitar solo, although unfortunately the synths arrive near the end to over-embellish once more. Live And Let Die is tackled with some vigour and has a few imaginative touches to its arrangement, while their re-creation of Rick Nelson's version of Fools Rush In is palatable despite its use of a too pronounced cowbell.

California Sun comes right at the end of the CD and almost saves the day as Leon pounds them skins with real power. There's a wonderful weedy organ faithful to The Rivieras' original and at last The Ventures sound as though they're having fun rather than taking care of business.

Of course this isn't really a bad CD, The Ventures always turn in a slick and professional performance these days. However, I get the impression that the tune selection has been made by M&I for the Japanese market and The Ventures have compensated for a lacklustre bunch by over-producing most of the tracks. It's okay I guess, but I expect so much more from them.

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

IN THE VAULTS Vol.4

CD

Ace Records CDCHD 1176; UK 2007; 65min

Journey To The Stars / Delicado / Station Breaks / Driving Guitars / Echo / Yellow Jacket / Delta Lady / Memphis / Black Tarantella / Original #1 / Beautiful Obsession / Bumble Bee / Son Of A Preacher Man / Downtown / Pedal Pusher / Medley: Walk Don't Run / Perfidia / Lullaby Of The Leaves / The Jam / Caravan /

THE MARKSMEN *Night Run / Scratch* / DON WILSON *Don't Avoid Me (v) / Heart On My Sleeve (v) / Like You've Never Known Before (v) / The Twomp (v) / Runaway (v) / Feel So Fine (v)*

I'm taking the unusual step of writing this up myself because we wanted to be the first to bring you news of what we think is a pretty sensational release. Now that we have had plenty of time to research the vaults we deliberately decided to go for the very best material that was available and produce one real humdinger of a CD that would virtually stand as a "Best Of" compilation. The majority of the tracks have never been issued before and the rest are the cream of the remaining rarities, and all are drawn from the band's '60s heyday. You will note that there are several very familiar titles but, don't be fooled, you will not have heard them quite like this before.

During searches in the vaults we came across the original source tape for the band's landmark live "On Stage" LP from 1965. The tape includes all of the tracks from the album before the audience was dubbed on. This is an incredible piece of good fortune because now we can hear some of the band's most dynamic recorded performances in perfect clarity. Amongst the unfamiliar titles there are several that are even good enough to have been issued as 45s at the time. *Delicado* is a wonderful arrangement of the South American classic with great guitar work from all concerned and *Echo*, with its haunting riff and punchy drums, sounds like one of those spy themes that The Ventures always handled with such panache.

There are also plenty of terrific Gerry McGee tracks to savour - *Delta Lady*, *Son Of A Preacher Man*, *Downtown* - all feature that distinctive McGee touch while *The Jam* must be his most dynamic studio recording ever. We also include Nokie Edwards' fantastic 45 that he cut with Gene Moles as The Marksmen. If you've not heard it before you are in for a treat as it's pure instro-rock heaven, with both *Night Run* and *Scratch* being taken from the original master tape and converted to the digital medium with Ace's legendary care.

You can also hear side one of what we like to think of as Don Wilson's first vocal LP, and what a marvellous album it would have been too! Hear The Ventures' wonderful early sound on *Heart On My Sleeve* as well as the original version of *The Twomp* minus the crackle that came with those old Blue Horizon's 45s! *Don't Avoid Me* and *Feel So Fine* are rare 45s from the mid-'60s and are easily the best vocal tracks they ever recorded - they could and should have been Top 100 hits. To add to these we bring you two previously unissued tracks. *Like You've Never Known Before* is a charming Latin-flavoured pop song in the *Concrete And Clay* mould, while *Runaway* is their earliest known recording of the Del Shannon classic.

From The Ventures' early days comes the powerhouse rocker *Station Breaks* complete with Howie Johnson's cracking rimshots, while *Original #1* features Mel Taylor on one of the first new tunes the band recorded after he joined them in 1962.

The list of delights is almost endless, and if you have the slightest interest in instrumental rock then you really owe it to yourself to add In The Vaults Vol.4 to your collection. We would also love to hear what you think of the CD in our Feedback column so please let us know!

Dave Burke

THE VENTURES

ROCKY!

CD

Toshiba TDCP-70259; Japan; 49min

Gonna Fly Now / Eye Of The Tiger / Little Green Bag / Turn! Turn! Turn! / What The World Needs Now Is Love / Oh Happy Day / He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother / Jesus Is Just Alright / You'll Never Walk Alone / Put Your Hand In The Hand / I Will Survive / We Are The World / All You Need Is Love / I Believe / The Impossible Dream / Diamond Head 2007

I often find that contemporary releases by The Ventures are quite difficult to fit into a time frame and this one is no different in that respect. With their live CDs it's always obvious that they are being a '60s band, but outside of those it's sometimes tricky to judge whether they are in the '70s, '80s, '90s or noughties - or if they are being modern, retro or something in between. The opening two tracks here certainly had me worried. Both are themes from the moronic series of Rocky films, *Gonna Fly Now* and *Eye Of The Tiger*, and both have something of a '70s sub-disco plod - which can't have been easy for a class drummer like Leon to bear. *Gonna Fly Now* also has brass and strings-like synth and some pronounced disco-ish bass runs which all add to the '70s feel. On the beaty *Eye Of The Tiger* they elect to use a synth for the bass pulse that ran through Survivor's original which certainly has a negative effect, and although the opening rhythm guitar chords are impressively aggressive the original tempo seems to be slowed down slightly so that it's even more of a plod.

The theme of the CD by the way is one of inspirational songs. Personally I find Rocky to be the least inspirational character imaginable. However, things suddenly take a turn for the better with *Little Green Bag* - a quite obscure US hit by Dutch band the George Baker Selection in 1970. Bob Spalding takes the quite sprightly lead on what is an unusual little number with lots of intriguing guitar sounds - cute! Nokie's first appearance on the CD with The Byrds' *Turn, Turn, Turn* continues the upwards trajectory and, although I would have liked a little more twelve string jingle-jangle, I have to say that overall it is quite a satisfying performance.

Now I'm beginning to think we are onto a winner - especially when *What The World Needs Now Is Love* arrives. This is a great arrangement that actually seems to enhance Jackie de Shannon's very fine song, and I particularly like Art Greenshaw's warm synth that hovers over the piece gently caressing the melody. Knowing that they cannot really match a full gospel choir in the midst of spiritual ecstasy, they sensibly decide to make Edwin Hawkins' *Oh Happy Day* more of a chug-along feel-good number and they pull it off really well. Next we have one of the '60s very own anthems - *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother* - and if there are any more uplifting numbers from that wonderful decade then I don't know about them. To this day it still leaves me with a lump in my throat, even though I now know that my "brother" is most likely to be a lunatic speeding driver who will cut me up in the beat of a drum. Still, it's a wonderful song and The Ventures do it proud.

Next is *Jesus Is Just Alright* and, although I find the thought that so many people believe in silly fairy stories truly depressing, I have to concede that The Ventures do a pretty zippy job on the old Doobie Brothers favourite. *You'll Never Walk Alone* is a marvellously inspirational song that has been criminally assaulted in the UK, firstly by Gerry Marsden and then by the appalling Liverpool football crowd who have wilfully reduced the noble lyrics to relate to something as mundane as a football match. There ought to be a law. Luckily The Ventures treat the song with the respect that it deserves and return some of its tarnished dignity with a pleasing performance.

Sadly Gerry McGee appears on only two numbers, which is a pity because he's one of the few guitarists who stamps his own distinctive character on anything he records. *I Believe* and, particularly, *Put Your Hand In The Hand* are both lifted several miles just by his sheer presence, and I've come to believe that he is the most under-rated Venture of all.

Bob Bogle pulls the poisoned chalice of lead guitar on *I Will Survive* and he does a brave job, but Gloria Gaynor he is not. To me *We Are The World* seems a slight song that has been elevated by way of its association with the laudable campaign to help reduce world poverty, but it's not really in the same class

as most of its companions here and The Ventures are not able to do too much with it. Surprisingly the same could be said of their treatment of The Beatles' *All You Need Is Love*. It should have bounded out of the speakers in a flurry of optimistic bonhomie, but somehow they let it fall on fallow ground, slowing the tempo and reducing it to just another mundane ballad. Pity.

Bob Bogle saves his best performance on lead guitar for *The Impossible Dream*. His minimalist approach works perfectly on this difficult-to-convey melody with every note hitting the emotions and Art Greenshaw's synth flourishes and full chords providing a sensitive backdrop to make it a peach of a performance all-round. Bob Spalding closes the show nicely with a fine re-working of *Diamond Head*, a classic tune that we just cannot have too much of.

Apart from the slightly dodgy start and the (very) odd duffo here and there, I have to say that this is a thoroughly enjoyable set by The Ventures. The inspirational idea may sound unlikely, but it proves to be a good one and enables the band to draw in some memorable songs. I guess that's the secret really, great songs are timeless and maybe, in their own way, The Ventures are too.

Dave Burke

#82
Pipeline 81 [2009] 50-51

THE VENTURES & THE FABULOUS WAILERS TWO CAR GARAGE CD

Blue Horizon Records BH 100-01; USA 2009; 50min

I Hear You Knockin' - Keep A Knockin' (v) / Surf Rider / Rebel Rouser / Wailin' / Out Of Our Tree (v) / Let's Go / Tequila / Needles & Pins (v) / Beat Guitar / Dirty Robber (v) / Wild Weekend / California Sun / Tall Cool One / When You Walk In The Room (v) / Wipe Out / Road Runner / Black Is Black (v) / Louie Louie (v)

Throughout their career The Ventures have thrown us the odd curve ball, and here's another. You would never have expected to see them combining with The Wailers to make a CD - sometimes playing separately and sometimes together, sometimes with vocals and sometimes without. Yes, it's a surprising mixture all right and my heart sank as I heard Don singing Smiley Lewis's *I Hear You Knocking* in a fairly weak, laid back way when... bam! Combined members of both bands suddenly slam in with a powerful shuffle beat that instantly lights things up. Bob Spalding's lead break is a peach, and then suddenly they up it a couple of gears as Kent Morrill comes in screaming Little Richard's *Keep A Knocking* whilst also frantically pounding away at his piano, and then Bob takes another scintillating break. Wow! Now this really is the way to start a CD.

Surf Rider follows with Nokie on lead and with The Ventures augmented by The Wailers' Dino Saldo on sax and it sounds great. The sax makes quite a difference and seems to add a fresh complexion to this old favourite. Next Don Wilson moves to the lead guitar spot for *Rebel Rouser* while Saldo hangs in there on sax and it's another very fresh sounding makeover. The Wailers make their first ensemble appearance on their own composition *Wailin'* and boy does it rock and wail! This is fabulous stuff that really gets your blood moving. Morrill's piano bangs away while John Hanford unleashes plenty of fierce guitar work excitingly supported by Neil Rush on tenor and baritone saxes and, with Buck Ormsby's bass pumping along and Ricky Lynn Johnson's drums urging them ever-onwards, this really is rock 'n' roll!

The Wailers continue with another dynamic workout of their early punk anthem *Out Of Our Tree* with Kent Morrill once again being utterly convincing as a great rock vocalist. It's then The Ventures' turn with two old chestnuts - *Let's Go* and *Tequila*. The former with Gerry McGee on lead and the latter with Nokie, and on both Dino Saldo adds his exciting tenor work to again bring a lot of freshness to both numbers. Surprisingly, against my expectations, I'm glad that they have been included.

Needles & Pins features members of both bands with Don taking the lead vocal, and it's another fine, punchy performance from the guys. The Wailers hit us with another brace of stompers, the intro *Beat Guitar* featuring Morrill's tinkling piano and Kim Egger's wild sax work, followed breathlessly by Morrill shouting out the lyrics to their classic *Dirty Robber* against the most thunderous drums from Dave Roland and more exciting sax work, this time from Ron Gardner.

The Ventures then provide us with two more classic intros in the shape of *Wild Weekend* and *California Sun*, both featuring the ever-dependable Gerry McGee on lead and with Leon Taylor's fast single-stroke accented roll growing ever more like his old man's (compliments don't come much higher than that) on *California Sun*. Phew! The Wailers hit us next with a rockin' revival of *Tall Cool One* - a formidable version coming just about as tall and cool as you can get. I could probably have done without the synthesiser (it's not credited, but it certainly sounds like one) and voice decoder featured on *When You Walk In The Room*, particularly as The Ventures made such a great job of it as an instrumental back in '65 but, hey, nothing is ever perfect.

Wipe Out is another number I've grown somewhat tired of over the years, but somehow The Ventures lift their game and it is certainly imbued with plenty of energy - and some of Bob Bogle's lead guitar is stunning! The Wailers' *Road Runner* is another beaty throbarama of a track and I just love John Hanford's funky lead guitar work. Los Bravos' *Black Is Black* is curious because somehow Kent Morrill and Don Wilson begin to sound quite similar to each other vocal-wise, but I could have done without Gerry's sitar - just not rock 'n' roll I'm afraid. The Wailers climax the set with a rousing version of *Louie Louie*.

I'm sure some people will criticise this CD for having too many vocals or too much of this and too little of that, but really this is just a great fun CD. It rocks satisfyingly from beginning to end with more vim and vigour than we have any right to expect from a bunch of predominantly 60 and 70 year old geezers, and the electric in-er-face production is just superb. Loved it.

Dave Burke

(Blue Horizon Records LLC, 3702 S 11th St, Tacoma,
WA 98705, U.S.A. www.TwoCarGarageMusic.com)

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