

From: *Shadsfax* 28 (2000) 12-13

Roberto Pistolesi, Malcolm Addey, Maurizio Mazzini
"That Sound! from Move It on, the story of the magic sound of the Shadows"
Vanni Lisanti, Italy
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160 pp.; supplied with CD containing: Hank Marvin interview; 15 tracks (the last three backing tracks) by Maurizio Mazzini: *Apache* / *The Breeze And I* / *Geronimo* / *Midnight* / *Dance On!* / *Santa Ana* / *Wonderful Land* / *Shazam!* / *Atlantis* / *Kon-Tiki* / *The Boys* / *Theme For Young Lovers* - *Midnight* / *Dance On!* / *Atlantis*

The main argument of this book was outlined in *Pipeline* 46 (1999) pp. 16-20. In a nutshell, it is this: on nearly all of The Shadows' early recordings, from *Saturday Dance* onwards, the lead guitar employed was not a Stratocaster, but a Gretsch. To take The Shadows' releases of 1960/1961 as a broad example, the Strat was featured on two numbers only, *Bongo Blues* and *The Stranger*.

This remarkable assertion sits side by side with Bruce Welch's sharply-worded reaction: "You are wrong: I was there" (p. 40). One can only guess at the motives that led the main author, Roberto Pistolesi, to refrain from offering any direct comment about this remark, or about Hank Marvin's categorical statement (pp. 35-6) that he used a Gretsch only very occasionally. Incredibly, brushing aside this primary evidence, he just carries on regardless, leaving his readers to infer that it is the individuals who were "there" that are "wrong". So, what might have been presented as a piece of harmless fun turns out to be anything but.

In putting together the demonstration CD designed to substantiate the claim, the procedure followed was to listen closely to a vinyl source until such times as the chosen lead guitar & accompaniments could be coaxed into providing "that sound" (not that "that sound" is ever defined precisely).

"A vinyl source", note. Compact Disc is out. *The Early Years* set is of "poor quality", we are informed, "due to excessive digital processing or probably [I suppose this must mean "more probably"] use of later generation copies of the original master" (p. 98). I was beginning to feel by this point that the book really ought to have been titled "The World According To R. Pistolesi". What exactly is judged to be sonically unacceptable here? Do all three authors feel this same dissatisfaction? Are there other CDs that are tolerable, or are all CDs to be dismissed as not up to the job? Don't look inside the covers for answers to any of these questions, there aren't any.

In reality, *The Early Years* set, like the 2CD *The Original Chart Hits* from the previous year, was produced directly from EMI master tapes. The sharply-etched sound of these digital transfers enables one to hear with full clarity the resonance and attack of the lead guitar. On vinyl copy these characteristics (among others) are obscured, to a degree dependent on record condition and other

factors.

Given all this, I have to admit that by the time I turned to the musical offerings I was already of the mind that however interesting they might turn out to be, their "closeness" or otherwise to the originals was to all intents and purposes an irrelevancy. For what it is worth, it came as no surprise to me that the insistence on using vinyl as a reference-point has left its mark. On *Apache* the lead guitar lacks bite for one thing. Listening to a different instrument, on *Dance On!* the "ringing Strat" (yes, this one is allowed to be a Strat) is nowhere in evidence: the tone is flat and lifeless, with none of the original's richness of texture. In contrast, the lead on *Atlantis* is too piercing by half: a Burns is used here (yes, a Burns, this being used for studio work well before 1964, it is alleged).

But: some people treated to early samples were bowled over by the sheer fidelity of it all, we are assured, so don't take my word for it.

Instead of the backing tracks (!) provided, I would have liked to hear, for one number or preferably more, just what "that [vinyl] sound" was that was being imitated. Other questions arise. What about the various unsuccessful experiments with a Fender? Were they all dismal failures, was the sound consistently too bright, or just a bit dull ... or what? Why couldn't we have had a specimen of an *Apache* that didn't make the grade for example? Was a Gretsch/ Fender comparison ever carried out against a CD source, and if so, what was the result? How could it happen that a succession of "perfect" matches was achieved instantly on one occasion (p. 38), whereas at a later date lengthy trials were necessary to reproduce the desired sound (p. 123)?

Leaving method aside, presentation and print-quality are generally good, though the English would have benefited from some proof-reading from a native speaker (some sentences do not hang together at all well). The illustrations are plentiful and not always the same old things; the properly pressed CD is tucked away neatly in a plastic wallet at the back of the book. In addition, the catalogue of recording dates is of interest, though only as a makeshift, since detailed and informed sessions listings are due to be published in the not too distant future.

I was puzzled however by the absence of formal acknowledgements: some of the photographs are captioned with sources but others are not, while the HM interview reproduced on the disc is apparently marketed on the assumption that anything you buy in a shop is yours to use as you like (conducted by Gloria Hunniford, it is almost certainly the property of the BBC). The twelve Shadows demonstration numbers do have composer-credits.

In the end though this book is mainly about those great hit records and also, by implication, about the credibility and artistic integrity of two of the musicians responsible for them. If any of the knowledgeable people consulted by the author(s) suggested that the case might have been put more soberly, nobody took any notice. What a pity.

MC