

THE ANIMALS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1964-1983</i>	<i>Classic rhythm'n'blues</i>	<i><u>Boom Boom</u> (1965)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Animals*

Years: *1964-1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

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THE ANIMALS

Album released:

September 1964

V A L U E
3 3 4 3 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) The House Of The Rising Sun; 2) The Girl Can't Help It; 3) Blue Feeling; 4) Baby Let Me Take You Home; 5) The Right Time; 6) **Talkin' 'Bout You**; 7) Around And Around; 8) I'm In Love Again; 9) Gonna Send You Back To Walker; 10) Memphis Tennessee; 11) I'm Mad Again; 12) I've Been Around.

REVIEW

The simplest way to lay one's hands on the Animals' self-titled debut and the two American albums that followed it is through the commonly available 2-CD EMI set entitled **The Complete Animals**; keep in mind, however, that it is «complete» only as far as their 1964-1965 recordings for MGM / Columbia, i. e. the Alan Price era, during which the band had not yet turned into a custom-made vehicle for advertising the limitless ego of Eric Burdon; instead, it was simply one of the most blunt, brutal, and soulful British rhythm'n'blues combos that, some might argue, could only really have emerged out of an appropriately blunt, brutal, and soulful location — like Newcastle-upon-Tyne.



This means that at least for this incarnation of the band it makes sense to remember at least a few separate identities. Eric Burdon, at this point, is just the frontman, though already an essential part of the band — its rough, rowdy, ballsy vocal piece, and the primary communicator of those sacred musical messages from across the Atlantic. Alan Price is the band's resident keyboard player with a strong preference for the organ, capable of extracting smokey, moody atmospheres that owe a lot to Ray Charles but display a ton of individuality. Hilton Valentine is the guitar player — not a particularly special one,

hardly in the league of Clapton when it comes to technique or Keith Richards when it comes to aggression, but it was Hilton Valentine who put on record those classic arpeggios for 'House Of The Rising Sun', and this already counts for something. And the rhythm section is John Steel on drums, who is mostly known as the longest-playing Animal in the history of the band (what a coincidence with the name of the Muppets' resident drummer!); and Chas Chandler on bass, who is mostly known as the future manager of Jimi Hendrix. This is not to say they are a bad rhythm section or anything — they do their jobs very well; they just rarely, if ever, try to stand out.

As is the case with most British bands of the period, it is of no principal importance whether the reviews be centered around their US or UK discographies, since none of the early albums were intended as conceptual entities. I do not have a rigidly enforced principle here — it all depends on specific circumstances; but as for the Animals specifically, following the band's US discography is a bit more comfortable, since US LPs were more numerous, packing all the songs that were only released as singles in the UK — although it does come at the expense of a little chronological chaos. Anyway, I am going to use as a pretext the fact that **The Animals** actually came out about one month *earlier* in the States than it went out to market in the UK. The major difference between the two versions was that the US one predictably included the A- and B-sides of the band's first two singles (as well as 'Blue Feeling', which eventually ended up as the B-side to 'Boom Boom'), while the UK version had five different LP-only songs in its place — which would, in due turn, be released on later LPs in the States. (It's all very simple, really. It also encourages you, the penniless young American teenager, to go out and buy almost the same album as a home product first and then again as a UK import).

Like most respectable British R&B bands of the time, the Animals had very little incentive to write their own songs — like the Stones and the Yardbirds, they would rather think of themselves as responsible for channeling the spirits of the classic blues and rock'n'roll masters across the Atlantic. At least Andrew Loog Oldham, savvy enough to perceive that original songwriting was the sole key to a stable and promising future, had goaded his protégés into writing 'Tell Me' to put a small stamp of personal interest on **The Rolling Stones**; Mickie Most, the producer of the Animals, had no such hold over the rowdy boys of Newcastle, and was happy enough to have them handle Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Ray Charles as long as they could transfer a bit of that rowdy live spirit on record. So how does the record hold up today?

Pretty damn fine, I'd say. Somewhere at the intersection of Burdon's voice and Price's fingers, the Animals struck upon a thoroughly unique sound, unashamedly appropriating (in the *good* sense of the word) these songs and making even such universally covered chestnuts as Chuck's 'Around And Around' or Ray's 'The Right Time' well worth your time in their

interpretations. Alan Price, in particular, is almost singlehandedly responsible for turning the electric organ into a rock weapon as powerful as the electric guitar. His playing may be technically less advanced / inventive and more «rootsy» and dependent on well-established blues patterns than that of his main contemporary competitor on the instrument — Rod Argent of the Zombies — but, for one thing, Price came first, and, for another, we are talking straightforward rhythm-and-blues here, while Argent's greatest achievements arguably lay beyond that particular realm.

On the record's faster numbers, Price's instrumental passages, with the legato overtones of the notes diffusing across one another, practically create an atmosphere of proto-psychedelia that must have driven rock'n'roll dancers punch-drunk in 1964 and still feel amazing today — check out his work on Ray Charles' 'Talkin' 'Bout You', where he is allowed to take a minute-long solo that already starts out punchy and fast and then just keeps building and building, with the organ waves occupying every metric inch of the sonic space, leaving you no place to breathe. On the slower ones, he knows how to make good use of the volume level, keeping it hush-hush potentially-threatening for a while and then breaking out into a frenzied flurry of notes before going back to a subdued grumble (John Lee Hooker's 'I'm Mad Again'). And even if he largely uses the same instrument and the exact same tone through the entire record, he knows well how to flesh it out in very distinct and different moods — playful, sorrowful, menacing, ecstatic — to ensure that it never gets boring.

As for Eric Burdon, I feel it is quite a challenge to dissect and describe the precise secret of his singing. For one thing, it is fair to say that he never had that much range to his voice, or that his trademark «powerhouse» delivery, stunning and even shocking as it might have been around 1964, has long since been beaten in terms of decibels by far throatier powerhouse vocalists, such as Noddy Holder of Slade (do note that most of those come from Scotland — must be all those barrels of ale that really make the difference). My best guess is that it is actually the combination of the powerhouse approach with a certain amount of refined intelligence — a phrase that would hardly be applicable to Noddy Holder's singing — that does the trick. Burdon knows not just to belt it out, but to actually play around with his voice, creating an intrigue for the listener. He also knows the value of *silence* just as he knows the value of all-out screaming; and he, perhaps best of all the early British rock'n'rollers, had mastered the voodoo art of classic bluesmen and R'n'B-ers with their capacity of subtly guiding the audience into a trance-like state through mantraic repetition of the simplest phrases.

Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that the Animals were the first British band to allow themselves, in the studio, to record an uninterrupted 7-minute jam — based on Ray Charles' 'Talkin' 'Bout You' and then eventually transitioning into the Isley Brothers' 'Shout'. When it is not Price in the spotlight, jamming those keys like there was no tomorrow, then it is always

Eric, blasting out his mini-mantras in tightly wound spirals, juggling one in the air for exactly as long as it takes to keep her fresh and then quickly exchanging her for another, even louder and screechier one. If those seven minutes felt like two or three to you, as they did to me, you know you are on the right track. (Too bad that the original pressing of the album only had a ridiculously condensed 2-minute version; the entire recording remained officially unissued until 1966, when it appeared on a compilation, thus unjustly depriving the Animals of setting an early record).

In between these two masters of the trade, even such thoroughly lightweight tracks as the band's very first single, 'Baby Let Me Take You Home', are delightful in their own right. The song was copped by the band from Dylan's 1962 acoustic arrangement of Eric Von Schmidt's 'Baby Let Me Follow You Down' and is still listed in textbooks as an early example of the folk-rock genre (allegedly it even bounced back on Dylan himself, inciting him to go electric, though it is always unclear whether the Animals or the Byrds were a bigger influence); I think, however, that the song's finest trick is to unpredictably shift gears for the coda and transform itself into thirty seconds of first-rate rave-up, borrowed from 'It's Alright' — for no other reason than to just put folk music and rhythm'n'blues in bed with each other and see what happens. (Spoiler: nothing particularly pornographic, it's more of a Manet's *Breakfast On The Grass* effect).

Personally, I prefer the Animals at their darkest, especially since they really like cranking up their psycho-theater to the max: thus, 'I'm Mad Again' takes the vampish embryo of a song which it was in John Lee Hooker's recording from 1961 and builds it up to a multi-layered, explosive performance. I revere John Lee Hooker as much as anyone, but it is an objective fact that, having heard 20 seconds of the song, you have pretty much heard it all; the Animals bring in their own dynamics, resulting in what is arguably the most believable impersonation of a nervous breakdown in British pop music up to that time. Alas, the only catch is that the darker stuff is still in an overwhelming minority on this album: in their earliest days, the band preferred to excite their audience and rock down the house, rather than hypnotize it into a state of deep shock by plunging into the abyss of darker emotions. Then again, moping and brooding and acting all Goth-like was hardly a good way to build up a loyal following in the sunny old days of 1963-64.

That said, of course, few things could be darker than the band's legendary take on 'The House Of The Rising Sun', a once-in-a-lifetime performance which has not lost one ounce of its terrifying power ever since. Its historical influence can hardly be overrated — it may not have singlehandedly invented «folk-rock» or any other genre, but it certainly was one of the earliest indications that rebellious teenage pop music could come equipped with genuine brains and authentic soul as opposed to the generally expected youthful brawn and adolescent lust. Incidentally, it also served as an important watermark in the

evolution of rock lyrics: apparently, Eric Burdon did not feel nearly as comfortable as Dylan about singing "it's been the ruin of many a poor girl, and me, oh God, I'm one", and had to change 'girl' to 'boy' — immediately, though unintentionally, transforming the song from a tragic, but predictable, folksy lament of a brothel-confined girl with family troubles into the equally tragic, but far more mysterious — *mystical*, in fact — plight of The Disspirited Young Man, in which "The House Of The Rising Sun" becomes an abstract allegory of the same nature as "Hotel California" would be twelve years later. (Unless you prefer to go for a more straightforward explanation and assume they are just singing about a *male* brothel... hey, don't blame me, I even browsed through a master's thesis on [male prostitution in New Orleans](#) to ascertain that there were probably no such things in The Big Easy, as opposed to male prostitution *per se*).

The historical importance of the track may also be reinforced by mentioning the record-breaking length of 4:29 for a single release (kudos to Mickie Most for greenlighting the idea), even though the US version still ruthlessly cut the song down to a three-minute length, and that was also the way it first appeared on the album; I don't think I even heard the short version, and I have no desire to — unlike certain lengthy Dylan ballads, where the only difference between certain verses lies in their lyrics, 'The House Of The Rising Sun' guides us through a perfectly orchestrated series of rises-and-falls, with the song's culmination midpoint represented by Price's solo, after which the song gradually rebuilds itself up through the next three verses. Cutting out even one of them is like fast-forwarding over a stripper removing a piece of her clothing, if you'll pardon the crude, but apt analogy (we *are* talking about The House Of The Rising Sun, after all).

From a purely emotional standpoint, though, the song is a prime beneficiary of what could be defined as the key ingredient to the success of classic Animals records: the Battle of Egos between Burdon and Price. On almost every one of these early tracks, the two key members of the band vie for our attention, and even though it may seem as if the ball is always in the singer's court by definition, each time the spotlight — even briefly — passes on to the organ player, there is a chance that he might leave you so stunned, it'll take you a while to pick yourself off the floor and remember about the vocalist's existence in the first place. On 'House', Price starts his anabasis off on a slow, deliberate note, with the organ part surreptitiously beginning to creep in not earlier than the beginning of the second verse — then keeps building up the volume, speed, and polyphony with each bar, so that we are perfectly ready by the time he breaks into the solo, which is probably quite close to the way it might have sounded, had J. S. Bach himself been offered a nice paycheck to put it on record. And it is Price, not Burdon, who gets to have the final word as well — with a series of gradually decelerating, dying-down, tragically submissive chords ending in an almost psychedelic final puff of organ smoke.

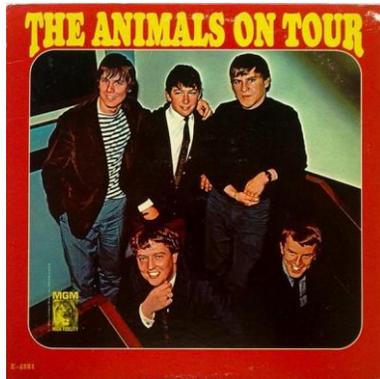
None of which should downplay the part played by Burdon, who gives a Shakesperian, epically tragic reading to the tale — realising, in a fairly common and accessible manner, its Grand Pathos potential which was already hinted at in Dylan's earlier reading; but Dylan's vocal tone and manner of singing is, as we all know, very much an acquired taste, and even if it was really Dylan who first transformed the song from *Ur-Hamlet* into *The Tragedy Of Hamlet*, just to use an actual Shakesperian analogy, there is just no getting away from the fact that the Animals' completion of the tune will always have much more mass appeal, working out a beeline for your emotional centers whereas Dylan's version takes a much more crooked and twisted path.

It is fairly odd, though, that 'The House Of The Rising Sun' pretty much stands out all alone in the Animals' catalog. One might have expected the band to try and capitalize on its success by seeking out even more old folk tunes to cover — yet they never opted for such a turn, instead continuing to focus on the blues, soul, R&B, and rock'n'roll material that was, in general, much closer to their rowdy Scottish hearts than all that Greenwich Village stuff. Yet I must say that, in general, the Animals are at their best when they try to be dark, moody, and soulful than when they try to just raise a ruckus and rock out; and for that reason, this debut LP does not cut it nearly as well as the follow-up records, because it leans way too heavily on the merry party stuff. For instance, while their cover of Chuck Berry's 'Around And Around' is generally tight and exciting, it does not compare well to the Stones' interpretation — Price and Burdon do the best they can, but the song begs for a more provoking, sleazy vocal like Jagger's, and a nastier, ruffian-like guitar tone like Richards'. Nor am I a major fan of their 'Memphis, Tennessee' (admittedly, few, if any, artists could add anything particularly interesting to that one after Chuck's original — though I do like that rigorous guitar flourish concluding each verse).

On a minor side note, it is amusing to sometimes see the band «adapting» those across-the-ocean imports for their young and ignorant British audiences (and, conversely, creating communicative problems for everybody else): for instance, Timmy Shaw's early 1964 hit 'Gonna Send You Back To Georgia', a sarcastic lyrical expansion of the old «you can get X out of the country» adage, is covered very close to the original, but renamed as 'Gonna Send You Back To Walker', where *Walker* is actually the residential area of Newcastle in which Burdon was born — which does give us a better understanding of the true feelings of Mr. Eric toward his native turf. (They also have made an important change of preposition, substituting "bring you *from* the South" for "bring you *to* the South". Wonder what all the confused American kids were thinking when this whole thing got re-imported to them). At least 'Memphis, Tennessee' is not turned into 'Blackburn, Lancashire' or whatever, though, admittedly, the lyrics to that one are nowhere near as culture-specific.

Ultimately, on the basis of a song-by-song battle, **The Animals** would inevitably lose to **The Rolling Stones**, being more blunt and brawny in its treatment of material which the Stones tried to present as nasty and naughty. Yet the Stones' debut did not have anything even remotely close to the power of 'House Of The Rising Sun', which is, on its own, the equal of pretty much everything the Stones released in 1964, and would have immortalized the name of the Animals even if they did not record anything else (and, for that matter, most people out there probably do not even suspect that the Animals recorded anything else — perhaps a few might recognize or remember 'Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood' or 'We Gotta Get Out Of This Place'?. not really sure). This fact alone makes both bands equi-important for 1964, with the Stones setting new standards of freedom and provocation for popular music and the Animals setting up a milestone in the transformation of popular music into the thinking man's playground — though, unfortunately, they failed to capitalize on their own achievement until it was too late for anybody to care all that much.





THE ANIMALS ON TOUR

Album released:
March 1965

V A L U E
3 4 4 2 4

More info:



Tracks: 1) Boom Boom; 2) How You've Changed; 3) Mess Around; 4) Bright Lights, Big City; 5) I Believe To My Soul; 6) **Worried Life Blues**; 7) Let The Good Times Roll; 8) I Ain't Got You; 9) Hallelujah, I Love Her So; 10) I'm Crying; 11) Dimples; 12) She Said Yeah.

REVIEW

Yes, the Animals did go on tour in the States... but not on this record. A cheeky-cheesy marketing strategy was worked out between MGM Records and Mickie Most in 1965, according to which both of the bands he managed at the time — the Animals and Herman's Hermits — would release an album called **On Tour**, probably to trigger some happy subconscious association in the heads of impressionable teens dying for an extra souvenir from the latest meeting with their idols. (The same trick would later be tried out by other labels, e.g. **Decca's Magic Bus: The Who On Tour**, released in 1968 and also containing no live recordings). In retrospect, this maybe wasn't so bad — with live recording technologies still in their infancy and hormonal screaming still generally overshadowing the musical nuances in 1965, getting one's hands on twelve brand new studio recordings instead of a piss-poor quality screamfest was a much better deal for the young ones.



Of course, with the usual confusing discrepancies between UK and US discographies, these twelve recordings weren't all *that* new at the time of release. In fact, this is just a usual mish-mash, consisting of several tracks carried over from the

band's UK debut ('Dimples', 'Boom Boom', 'She Said Yeah'), one important non-album single ('I'm Crying'), and the rest of the songs previewing the band's second UK LP, **Animal Tracks** (not to be confused with the later US LP of the same name, provided you can help it). Just as it is with the Stones, though, it is really difficult to tell which of the discographies in this case should be considered more «authentic», given the lack of conceptual structure in both sets of LPs and the fact that both bands' UK-based producers and managers seemed to prefer to work with the US market, from which they obviously made a much larger profit. So let's just lower our defenses, temporarily allow ourselves to be dominated by the American corporate industry, and get on with it.

There is no single outstanding classic track on here that could hold up to the epochal standard of 'House Of The Rising Sun' (and we shouldn't blame them for this) — but on the whole, **The Animals On Tour** ends up more consistently impressive than the first US album. In particular, the band's basic rock'n'roll and dance-oriented R&B chops are well represented by Larry Williams' 'She Said Yeah', which rocks with the same slightly childish exuberance as the rock'n'roll tracks on **The Animals** (no wonder — they all come from the same early sessions), and Ray Charles' 'Mess Around', which shows a new level of confidence for Price as he directly challenges the master... and fails, because the true coolness of Uncle Ray's performance is in how his left hand walks all over the boogie bass line while his right one is kicking the shit out of those staccato chords, while Price leaves most of the bass work to the bass guitarist, instead «messing around» with the melodic potential of the higher octaves — it removes much of the original's sharpness. Still, it's good because it's handled in a fairly different way, and Burdon's vocal performance, for compensation, goes to wilder territory than Ray's; I love both versions (as opposed to, for instance, the ridiculously disco-ified live version from Squeeze in 1980).

More importantly, the rock'n'roll sound is finally tested out on a piece of genuinely original songwriting: 'I'm Crying', credited to Burdon and Price, was their first single after 'The House Of The Rising Sun', and it's a fabulous piece of work, based on an easily recognizable bluesy chord sequence that they ingeniously sped up and transformed into a head-spinning up-and-down roller coaster (the Kinks would later steal it away and make it even more crunchy for their own 'Mr. Churchill Says'). The tiny touch of genius, of course, is in how they bring specific extra meaning to the traditionally empty vocalise of "aaaah – aaaah – ah!" by merging it with the chorus of "I'm crying, I'm crying, hear me crying". It's like, first you hear the "aaaah" and it's «okay, nice little vocalise», then you get to the verse and then to the chorus and then it's "aaah" time again and a little light bulb lights up, «oh, *that's* what the vocalise was about! they're *crying!*» It probably seems silly to you, but I am a big fan of such quirky little moves which can put the yeah-yeah-yeahs and the sha-la-las in a proper context (which most singers and songwriters very rarely do). Plus, Alan is a real beast on the organ, and Eric's frenetic vocal buildup from

first to last verse is a classic instruction in raising tension. Alas, the song failed to repeat the chart success of 'House Of The Rising Sun' (though it still cracked the Top 10 in the UK), which likely convinced Mickey Most that the band would never make it as competent songwriters, so from then on all of their original compositions would be confined to B-sides, possibly the most dumbass decision of the band's entire career which *very* likely contributed to the sad demise of its most classic and seminal incarnation.

Fortunately for us, at the time the band was still on a roll when it came to expanding their cover repertoire to the darker and deeper regions of the contemporary American blues and soul scene — and reinventing them for the white youth market of 1965. The Animals' John Lee Hooker and Jimmy Reed, in particular, are subverted, inverted, and reconstructed to the point of becoming unrecognizable. Hooker's takes on songs like 'Boom Boom' and 'Dimples' were quiet, grim, and gloomy; when listening to them, you will most likely visualize the hellbound old black man busking in the street, creeping out little girls who pass him by while mumbling 'like the way you walk, like the way you talk' under his breath in a decidedly unsanitary manner. With Burdon and the boys, both of these songs come out of the closet and become loud, brawny, relentless, and thoroughly unsubtle expressions of drunken lust — you could say that they try to infuse John Lee Hooker's blues with the spirit of James Brown's R&B, yet there is a sort of brutality here which could never come from James Brown, but only from a working class dude from Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

There is this particular moment in 'Boom Boom', already *after* Eric has unfurled the battle cry of "come on, let's shake it!" and the rest of the band has donned its hoodlum caps while sweeping through town on a Clockwork Orange rampage, at the very end of the chorus where he brings things down with "come on, come on, all right, all right" and the next sustained "all right" slides right into Valentine's and Price's solos, which pretty much symbolizes the spirit of early '65 rock'n'roll for me. I am not sure why; maybe it is the air of heroic, Rolandian determination with which the instrumental players take off the same note as the vocalist and lead this multi-pronged attack — there are few tracks from that era on which vocals, guitar, and organ would be so much in sync *and* all three would be so blunt and primal, yet in a friendly and cheerful manner rather than a viciously aggressive one. They're really smashing all your windows and tables on this one, but they're doing it because they just feel so doggone good. They might even compensate you for the damage when they're done, but if they forget to, you'd be a real asshole to press charges against such nice lads, you know?

But they are not just ruffians from the street — they can be quite *creative* ruffians from the street when the situation calls for it. For instance, Jimmy Reed's 'Bright Lights, Big City' used to be just another in an innumerable series of totally same-

sounding Jimmy Reed songs. Here, it is transformed from its plain origins into a little dynamic suite, replete with a new quiet mid-section and ad-libbed lyrics, in which Eric names all the city perils that conspire to turn his girl loose — "long Cadillacs... Rolls Royce... men with money... cigarettes... flamenco... scotch... bourbon..." — before returning to the song's main theme, now reprised in an even more hystrionic manner once the narrator *fully* realizes, much to his horror, all the negative consequences that moving to the big city can work on a country girl.

But maybe the biggest overall change from the first album is the addition of a new style to the band's repertoire: slow, dark, psychologically challenging soulful blues. They did not record any such songs in 1964, possibly not yet feeling enough confidence to embrace the style; with the success of 'House Of The Rising Sun', however, Burdon and Price were more than willing to try out some of that nuanced heart-pulling, so **The Animals On Tour** includes no fewer than three slow blues numbers — the classic 'Worried Life Blues', Chuck Berry's 'How You've Changed', and Ray Charles' 'I Believe To My Soul'. These might take a bit of time to sink in (particularly if you are not a big fan of the 12-bar form), but at the end of the day they show the Animals to be complete masters of the form, and I *mean* it: no other UK act at the time did this kind of material with as much flair and depth as these guys (most UK acts would not, in fact, touch *soulful* blues with a 10-foot pole, and the ones that did simply did not have that combination of talent).

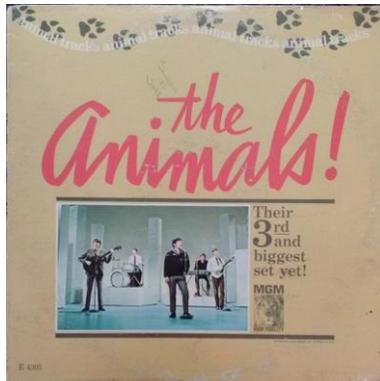
For 'I Believe To My Soul', Burdon actually wrote a whole new set of lyrics — replacing not only the obviously incongruous bit about "I heard you say 'oh, Johnny' when you know my name is Ray" (I guess "when you know my name is Eric" just does not fit the meter too well, and besides, what's a good rhyme for 'Eric'? *Cleric?*), but also Ray's aggressive "I think I'm gonna have to use my rod" line, which is sort of an instructive reminder that *sometimes* them white dudes were actually cutting down on the misogynistic flair of them black dudes. (Eric replaces it with a really odd line, though: "You keep complaining my progression is slow / You shouldn't complain, babe, you ought to know" — not sure which «progression» he is talking about). More importantly, it is just a great, great performance, this time fully capturing and even enhancing the magic of Ray Charles with a beautiful piano part from Price (they speed up the song a bit, which gives them enough time to insert a technically brilliant and emotionally moody piano solo into the tune's three and a half minutes).

The crown gem, however, is 'Worried Life Blues', for which Price once again switches to organ and delivers one of the best performances of his entire career — the church tone of his Vox Continental gives a bit of a Bach flair to the opening and never lets go throughout the song. In intensity and soulfulness, this is maybe just a few short steps away from 'House Of The Rising Sun', mainly because the effect is more «introverted», but in terms of musicianship, this might even be superior,

especially if you contrast Price's organ with the quiet, tasteful, muffled jazzy lines of Hilton Valentine, playing as if he were some humble disciple of Wes Montgomery doing his own thang from behind a paper wall in a different studio. Finally, throw in Burdon's clever separation of the hookline into three different parts — most bluesmen sing "someday baby, ain't gonna worry, my life no more" in three tonally equal blasts, but Burdon prefers to do it in «ready, aim, shoot!» mode, giving his protagonist the kind of tragic determination you can only encounter in a great *soul*-blues performance. Ray Charles could do this it; John Lee Hooker or Big Bill Broonzy could not. Eric does this in Ray Charles mode, and he does it better than Ray Charles ever did (Ray covered the song two years earlier, and it is not one of his best).

All of this greatness makes the relative lowlights of the album easily forgivable — Shirley Goodman's lightweight ditty 'Let The Good Times Roll' (*not* to be confused with another Ray Charles classic) is catchy, silly, and fluffy; Jimmy Reed's 'I Ain't Got You' is good, but I think the Yardbirds had a more definitive version; and yet *another* Ray Charles classic, 'Hallelujah I Love Her So' is... well, you can hardly improve on perfection, and, unlike the case of 'I Believe To My Soul', the Animals have little to offer in this case. All of these songs are still perfectly enjoyable and do nothing bad to the overall flow — so I can only repeat that in terms of sheer consistency, of the three Price-era US LPs **The Animals On Tour** gives you the best deal for your money and shows an impressive amount of progress for a band so stubbornly refusing to (or not being allowed to) grow out of its «cover band» status.





ANIMAL TRACKS

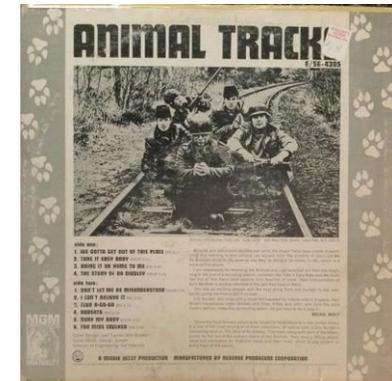
Album released:

September 1965

V A L U E

3 4 4 2 4

More info:



Tracks: 1) We Gotta Get Out Of This Place; 2) Take It Easy Baby; 3) Bring It On Home To Me; 4) The Story Of Bo Diddley; 5) **Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood**; 6) I Can't Believe It; 7) Club A-Go-Go; 8) Roberta; 9) Bury My Body; 10) For Miss Caulker; 11*) It's My Life; 12*) I'm Gonna Change The World.

REVIEW

The biggest mish-mash and hodge-podge of the Animals' short, sweet, and schizophrenic US discography, the **Animal Tracks** LP has only two songs in common with its similarly-named UK counterpart released a few months earlier. The simplest way to go about it is to remember that the UK edition of **Animal Tracks** was essentially the equivalent of the already reviewed **Animals On Tour**, while the US-issued **Animal Tracks** was an assortment of odds-and-ends stretching all the way back to mid-1964 and then all the way forward to mid-1965, including even a couple of recordings made after the departure of Alan Price from the band. Its only value was in how carefully it swept out all the corners, putting together all the A- and B-sides and all the songs that were left off earlier American albums in favor of even more A-sides so that at the end of the day, the LP trio of **Animals**, **Animals On Tour**, and **Animal Tracks** more or less exhausted all the master takes that the original Animals recorded in 1964–65. (Of course, today that function is more than perfectly fulfilled by simply purchasing the 2-CD **Complete Animals** package, which will also throw in a couple extra outtakes and the 'It's My Life' single for good measure).



Since more than half of the album is, essentially, the story of The Animals' single releases throughout 1965, let us trace that back, first and foremost. The band started out in grand fashion, with a recording that showed they were very much ready to expand beyond their rhythm'n'blues foundations — a cover of Nina Simone's 'Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood', unusual not only in its choice of source material but also in how much Burdon, Price and co. reworked the song, adapting it from the original jazz-ballad-à-la-Nina style to a sort of art-pop-rock setting, in much the same experimental way in which The Yardbirds were adapting other people's material at the same time. With this effort, Eric Burdon was no longer the «Geordie answer to John Lee Hooker» — he was carving out a proper niche for himself as a soul singer in his own right.

With all the deep reverence I have for Nina Simone and for [her original recording](#) of this quasi-Broadway tune in particular, I do believe that it took the Animals to fully realize its potential. It is a bit more than symbolic, for instance, that the classic opening riff of the song (which would later be shamelessly and defiantly appropriated by Bruce Springsteen for his own 'Badlands') is *hinted* at by the string section on Nina's recording, which plays the first half of the future riff, but it takes Alan Price to complete the line by turning it into an «outburst-and-retraction» thing, ideally encompassing the song's main spiritual point. And then, of course, there is Eric's performance, which is far more representative of said point, too. This is, after all, a song about repenting for one's mistakes committed in an emotionally frustrated state — and who better to sing it than Britain/Scotland's single most emotionally frustrated singer at the time? All through *her* version, Nina only really captures the final stage of the emotional journey — the exhausted and desperately repenting one — whereas Eric actually swings back and forth between despair and aggression. His own "*I'm just a soul whose intentions are good!*" sounds like it's actually being sung with his fists still clenched, and this makes the whole thing psychologically more complex.

And that is not even mentioning the overall *musical* complexity of the reworked version, which may, perhaps, not be a great advance on the overall musical sophistication of Nina Simone but is quite a bit of a milestone in the evolution of the pop-rock musical world. Watch the «stuttering» pattern of the opening section, for instance, which makes these odd little pauses in the regular 4/4 beat when Price's organ is left hangin' in the air and John Steel, the drummer, gently supports it with four soft kicks of the bass drum. The transition from this broken-bossa-nova kind of verse into the martial chorus, mediated by just a tiny touch of what feels like tape delay on the organ. The deep «Gregorian» harmonies of the other band members, creating a dirge-like ambience for Eric to unleash his wailing in. If there's anything to complain about, it's that the song sort of runs out of new ideas to explore around the time it hits up the second verse — were this the Beatles, I'm sure they'd come up with something extra exciting at each new turn. Perhaps an Alan Price organ solo would not be out of place (unlike his

role on 'House Of The Rising Sun', here he is rather strictly confined to just replaying the key riff over and over and over). Even so, the first half of the song is so damn great that simply looping it around for the second half is a forgivable sin. After all, "*no one alive can always be an angel*".

While we're at it, let us not forget the B-side of the single, either. I feel like 'Club A-Go-Go', credited to Burdon and Price, might have been inspired by some Chuck Berry, starting with the recently published 'No Particular Place To Go' and going all the way back to bluesy romps like 'No Money Down' — ironically, though, it would be its own main keyboard riff and stomping beat that would, several months later, form the basis for Bob Dylan's 'Highway 61 Revisited' (as a big fan of classic Animals, I'm sure Bob must have quickly assimilated that sound within his own subconscious). The main importance of the song being officially self-composed is that it is The Animals' first proper love anthem to their own cultural turf — the Club a'Gogo in Newcastle, a veritable Mecca of sorts for jazz, R&B, and rock aficionados from 1962 to 1968; and Eric's "*it's one of the coolest spots in town*" message is the first one in his gradual self-appointment as the MC-extraordinaire of the messianic mission of rock'n'roll, a journey that would eventually result in one too many artistic embarrassments, but this first step is just perfect. The song rocks, Price and Valentine are both on fire, and Eric namedrops all those illustrious guests (John Lee Hooker, Rolling Stones, Sonny Boy Williamson...) at the end of the song with such unfettered pride as if he had just accepted a permanent position as Assistant Doorman at the entrance. Good times!

It's too bad that the band could not maintain the same level of quality for their next single — which, as it turned out, would be the last one to feature Alan Price. 'Bring It On Home To Me' is a great song, but apparently there is no way to improve on it after the definitive Sam Cooke original, and although both Eric and Alan try hard, they can't really poke those walls hard enough to open up a passage to any new dimensions. Then again, my guess is that they simply wanted to pay a little tribute to Sam, whose killing was still quite fresh on everybody's minds at the time — so it shouldn't really be regarded as an attempt at a solid artistic statement or anything. The B-side, 'For Miss Caulker', a slow generic 12-bar blues formally credited to Burdon, actually suits the general style of the Animals much better, though it certainly pales in comparison to 'Worried Life Blues' or 'I Believe To My Soul' (it's kinda fun to hear Alan switch to electric piano for a change, though).

Exit Price then, for reasons that are still not perfectly clear but apparently involved fear of flying, meaning that he could not accompany The Animals on their American tour. His departure could be logically perceived as the reason why the band ultimately did not manage to make a proper transition from the early rhythm'n'blues Sixties into the psychedelic mid-Sixties — what with the man's organ sound being such a vital part of the band, and with him taking away the lion's share of

the band's songwriting talent, too. But what was probably more detrimental — in the *long* run — is that Price's departure really took all the stops out of Eric Burdon's ego. Think, for a moment, of Paul McCartney leaving the Beatles around, say, the middle of the sessions for the **White Album**, leaving John Lennon as the master of the band at the height of his preoccupation with avantgarde and politics — that would be a rough analogy of what happened to the Animals.

In the *short* run, though, given that it was still 1965 and the world of popular music still rotated around the axis of three minute long pop singles, it was not too bad — actually, it was even brilliant for a while. 'We've Gotta Get Out Of This Place', the Animals' most commercially successful recording since 'House Of The Rising Sun' and, consequently, also the opening track on this **Animal Tracks** LP, is a textbook classic, and even if it was not written by the Animals (Mickey Most fell upon the Barry Mann / Cynthia Weil demo almost by accident), I know of no covers — and there's a shitload of them — that match or exceed the punch of the original. From the opening suspense of Chas Chandler's bass line and Eric's sinister "*in this dirty old part of the city...*", presented in scary-story mode, the song just keeps on building, alternating between the nightmarish present and the dream of revolutionary escapism. Sure, the lyrics still come from the Brill Building, but it takes a working class hero from Newcastle to bring them to life — that whole verse about "*Now my girl, you're so young and pretty / And one thing I know is true / You'll be dead before your time is due*" might just be the single grittiest, harshest thing to come out of the entire early British Invasion.

It's pretty much a perfect recording; it even illustrates how the Animals had become masters of the subtle touch — watch John Steel's delicate work with the cymbals over the opening bars, the kind of build-up that would reach its apogee on hard rock classics like AC/DC's 'Hells Bells'. Nor is Eric just screeching his head off: his delivery of the "*you'll be dead before your time is due*" is drowning in exaggerated grinning cynicism, as if he'd just finished reading *A Clockwork Orange* before entering the studio. Perhaps the slightly too cheerful, almost pub-style chorus might feel a little emotionally out of place next to the angry swelling bubbles of the verse and the bridge — but then the song is not really about suffocating inside one's own depression, it's about finding hope outside its borders. My experience is that most of the remaining *normal* people over the past seventy years fall into two categories — those whose household slogan is "*We've gotta get out of this place*" and those who'd rather align with "*I'll never get out of this world alive*", and, as a self-appointed optimist, Eric Burdon would clearly side with the former rather than the latter. Good for him.

The exact same month that saw the release of **Animal Tracks** also saw the Animals repeat the formula with 'It's My Life', a song in many ways similar to its predecessor — it also came out of the Brill Building (written by the largely unknown Roger

Atkins and Carl D'Errico), it was also written as a socially relevant protest song, and it was also arranged as a song of suspense and build-up, except that this time the major hook — I may be wrong, but I think it was for the first time in Animals history — consisted of a looping guitar riff, 'Satisfaction'-style but with an ice-cold rather than fiery tone to it. In a way, that might have been an indirect consequence of replacing Alan Price with Dave Rowberry, a solid keyboard player with nowhere near as much musical imagination; but even if it was, it is hard for me to imagine a similarly nasty-sounding piano or organ riff — 'It's My Life' and that ice-queen-on-the-march guitar figure were made for each other.

Amusingly, I think that many, if not most people, probably missed the actual message of the song, because the one part that really sticks out is, of course, the beginning of the chorus — *"It's my life, and I'll do what I want / It's my mind, and I'll think what I want"* — so we'll all be sure that this is a defiant anthem of youthful self-assertion in the face of the oppressive older generation. Which it is, but consider also such verse lines as *"There are ways to make certain things pay / Though I'm dressed in these rags / I'll wear sable some day"* or *"Are you gonna cry when I'm squeezin' them dry? / Taking all I can get, no regrets"*. The song's protagonist is not only *not* thinking here of overthrowing the existing order, he is no longer even preoccupied with getting out of this place — on the contrary, he is planning to milk the system for all it's got, survival-of-the-fittest style, and since it is difficult to suspect Mr. Burdon of openly glorifying such a mindset, it is clear that *"it's my life and I'll do what I want"* has to be taken ironically, with its «message» being quite the opposite of *"this is my generation, baby"* and suchlike.

At least, such seems to have been the original intention of the writers. How exactly did Burdon himself interpret the song is less clear — and *even* less clear in light of the single's bizarre B-side, 'I'm Going To Change The World', credited to Eric himself. What the song does is basically steal and recycle the riff from 'It's My Life', speeding it up a bit and looping it for most of the track's duration, then set it to a 100% progressive set of lyrics: *"Hold your fire and listen mister / Don't cause no trouble for my brother and sister"* and so on. No irony or role-playing in sight. By all accounts, the song should suck, but I love it. The riff just keeps swirling around like a solid sample in some classic hip-hop recording, Eric's vocal is ferocious, the *"you can bet your liiiiiife, baby, bet your life!"* chorus resolution kicks your ass into the stratosphere, and the minimalistic instrumental break, when it's just that riff twirling and Rowberry doing that proto-psychedelic extended organ arpeggio bit, as if he's gripping his own instrument in a choke hold. Tempestuous, tight, and catchy — what's not to like? Sometimes I even feel like I appreciate the groove more than the original 'It's My Life' (and I do feel, for instance, that the chorus integrates far more seamlessly into the verse than it does on the Brill Building compositions).

Unfortunately, the single came out a little too late to be included on the album, but since it did not make its way onto the last proper Animals album (**Animalisms / Animalization**) either, I like to pretend that it's still a natural part of the experience, which would bring the total number of the tracks from a pitiful ten to a reasonable twelve. As for the rest, the breakdown is as follows:

(a) the earliest stuff — 'Take It Easy' was a rather non-descript B-side for the far superior 'I'm Crying', and two more tracks that had been left off the original **Animals** album in its UK version to make way for the hit singles: 'Bury My Body' is a decent take on the old Blind Lemon Jefferson et al. spiritual, but the real kicker is, of course, 'The Story Of Bo Diddley', which borrows the Bo Diddley beat but uses it to narrate, talking-blues style, a chunk of the biography of Bo Diddley which somehow then manages to turn into a brief history of rock'n'roll from Bo to the «dark years» of 1960–62 and then to the Beatles and Rolling Stones, and then even has some time to narrate a personal anecdote about the band's meeting with Bo during his UK tour. It's quite hilarious, really, and it's notable how even at that early age (mid-1964!) Burdon was already trying to become a bona fide spokesman and chronicler for the spirit of rock'n'roll — and it's *much* more entertaining and *much* less pretentious, might I add, than whatever «Eric Burdon & The Animals» would have in store for the Flower Power generation three years later;

(b) the slightly later stuff — in addition to the 'Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood' single, recorded in mid-November of 1964, there is also a cover of Frankie Ford and Huey "Piano" Smith's 'Roberta' from the same session, which, along with 'For Miss Caulker', is the only point of intersection between the US and UK editions of **Animal Tracks**. Not a lot here to recommend the cover over [the original](#) — the added Hilton Valentine guitar solo is weak, and although Eric does try to raise tension over the course of the song, rather than keeping it at the same level like Frankie does, I think that it works better in its original «New Orleans fun» vibe, losing some power when transferred to a more «serious» setting across the Atlantic.

In any case, while this was hardly a big problem on the previous two records, **Animal Tracks** has a bit *too* much distance from the likes of 'Take It Easy' and 'Roberta' to those of 'We've Gotta Get Out Of This Place', though in this respect it is hardly all that different from, for instance, the Yardbirds' debut which mashed together the earliest Clapton-era recordings with the latest Beck-era tracks like there was no tomorrow. But then the original Animals were never really an album-oriented band in any sense: they never had any clear strategy for arranging the space on their LPs, and neither, I guess, had their so-called producer, Mickie Most, who never really took any of his artists seriously because to him, making music was never about being serious in the first place. (From Herman's Hermits to Hot Chocolate, most of his protégés will probably

vouch for that). By the time the band came to its senses and fired Mickey for trying to get them to record the same kind of material he was offering to Herman's Hermits, it was already too late to care about integrity.

Still, much to the honor of the original Animals, while there are some tracks here that are clearly more forgettable than others, **Animal Tracks** upholds their reputation in that there is not a single — not one! — pre-1966 Animals track that I find less than honestly enjoyable. For all of their Burdon-Price period and even a little bit beyond that, they remained one of the three or four most quintessential bands of the early British Invasion, probably on par with the Beatles and Stones in terms of consistent quality and taste, if not actual musical inventiveness, and certainly way above the earliest Kinks and Yardbirds. Consequently, all three albums, nicely (though chaotically, in terms of chronology) merged into the **Complete Animals** package, constitute a major cornerstone of the rhythm'n'blues legacy of 1964–65, and the sounds, vibes, and messages hold up brilliantly even unto the next century, I do so believe. How and why exactly, unlike the Beatles and the Stones, the band was unable to make a proper transition into the next era of popular music, is a rather futile question, but in any case, it should not be taken as an excuse to ignore its classic period — unless you also happen to be somebody who believes that the Beatles are not worth listening to until at least **Rubber Soul**, or that the Stones never made a good album until **Beggar's Banquet**.

