

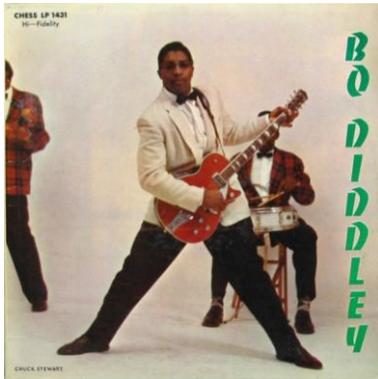
BO DIDDLEY



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1955-1996</i>	<i>Early rock'n'roll</i>	<i><u>Who Do You Love?</u> (1956)</i>

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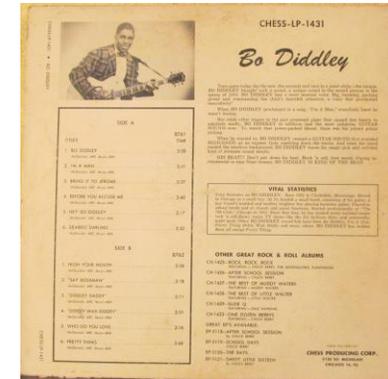


BO DIDDLEY

Compilation released:
1958

V A L U E
3 4 3 4 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) *Bo Diddley*; 2) I'm A Man; 3) Bring It To Jerome; 4) Before You Accuse Me; 5) Hey! Bo Diddley; 6) Dearest Darling; 7) Hush Your Mouth; 8) Say Boss Man; 9) Diddley Daddy; 10) Diddey Wah Diddey; 11) *Who Do You Love*; 12) Pretty Thing; 13*) She's Fine She's Mine; 14*) I'm Looking For A Woman; 15*) I'm Bad; 16*) Cops And Robbers; 17*) Down Home Special; 18*) Mona; 19*) Willie And Lillie; 20*) Bo Meets The Monster.

REVIEW

This is probably a crying shame, but I must say that I have never been the hugest fan in the world of what is commonly known as the «Bo Diddley beat». When it comes to rocking the very foundations of my conscience, it is the likes of Chuck Berry's naughty guitar licks, Jerry Lee Lewis' assassinations of the piano, and Scotty Moore's steady-as-a-rock amplification of Elvis' legendary status which always take precedence over Bo's relatively rigid and predictable formula — essentially just an electrified rendering of a traditional Juba dance in its African-American form ("Juba dis and Juba dat, Juba killed da yellow cat"), which means that Bo did not even have to «invent» much of anything; all he had to do was plug in his guitar.



Not that plugging in like that was anything short of a miracle back in 1955: 'Bo Diddley' (the song) sounded like nothing else at the time. It is essentially two parts past and one part future — combining an ancient African dance rhythm pattern, a lyrical motive going back to an Anglo-Saxon folk tradition ("Hush Little Baby"), and a prominent tremolo effect on the guitar which adds a proto-psychedelic feel to the whole thing. For a composition released on the Chess label in the mid-1950s, this was as daring and futuristic as possible at the time — and it also showed the label's first willing sign to move away from its

rigorous support of the pure 12-bar blues formula (the second sign would be Chuck Berry's 'Maybellene' just a few months later — but in strict terms of musical innovation, Chuck Berry was a conservative traditionalist compared to Bo Diddley's musical vision at that particular point in time).

Unfortunately, Bo's biggest problem was that, having said A, he found it hard to follow it with a B. Some of his subsequent recordings which also utilized the Bo Diddley Beat (let us abbreviate it to BDB from now on) did improve on 'Bo Diddley' in sheerly technical terms — speed, tightness, sound clarity, funnier lyrics, etc.; but none of them succeeded in taking it any place further than the original explosion. Minor variations on chord structure could be observed, or the addition of extra instruments (e.g. the piano groove on 'Hush Your Mouth'), but the general mood, energy level, overall effect on the brain would always remain the same. Not coincidentally, you might notice that most of the British Invasion fans of Bo Diddley were usually quite content with covering one and *only* one sample of the BDB — e.g., the Stones only did 'Mona', and the Animals, who probably were the best interpreters of Bo Diddley across the Atlantic, only recorded a cover of 'Pretty Thing', although they would also go on to write their own 'The Story Of Bo Diddley' as an homage to / parody of the BDB.

But before succumbing to sadness and disillusionment, let us also try to revive ourselves with a deeper, more thoughtful immersion into the man's creativity — and realize that there is much more to Bo Diddley than the proverbial, occasionally tiresome BDB. In fact, even on this «debut album», which is not really a proper LP but rather just a collection of several of Bo's A- and B-sides spanning almost four years (from 1955 to 1958), only three out of twelve tunes strictly follow the BDB proper: 'Bo Diddley', 'Hush Your Mouth' (with the extra piano), and 'Pretty Thing' (with extra harmonica, so at least formally there is enough variation to be forgiving). Of the others, some would probably be expected to also follow the BDB ('Hey Bo Diddley', for instance, which is sung to the exact same vocal melody as 'Bo Diddley'), but in reality they do not, since the rhythm pattern has been modified to such an extent that it can no longer qualify. Finally, other songs are altogether quite removed from the basic formula, and follow different paths of inspiration — perhaps not as innovative as the BDB but sometimes, in my own view, even more exciting.

As already stated, Bo Diddley, along with Chuck Berry, was somewhat of an anomaly for the Chicago-based Chess Records, whose overall specialization used to be less explicitly dance-oriented electric bluesmen, from Muddy Waters to Howlin' Wolf to Little Walter to Buddy Guy. But with 'Rock Around The Clock' and other early rock'n'roll recordings already ruffling the feathers of more time-honored genres, it is hardly surprising that the Chess executives, too, were looking to diversify their output with something a bit more energetic, aggressive, and commercially viable. Besides, it's not as if Bo Diddley

himself was a total stranger to straightforward 12-bar blues. In his live shows at Chicago clubs, he always played a mix of the tried-and-true with the fresh-and-daring, and there is at least one notable example of the former on this record: 'Before You Accuse Me', a straightforward piece of 12-bar blues somewhat in the style of Sonny Boy Williamson, one of Chess' major blues stars at the time. Amusingly, even here Bo could not resist slightly speeding up the tempo, so that the final result looks like a cross between old-fashioned blues and new-fashioned rock'n'roll. (The 1970 cover version by Creedence Clearwater Revival is expectedly sharper and more polished, but the song as a whole still firmly belongs in 1957).

However, the very first of Bo's blues-based songs in the Chicago vein, already released as the B-side to his very first single, was anything *but* typical. Essentially, 'I'm A Man' simply takes Muddy Waters' 'Hoochie Coochie Man' and deconstructs it down to the basics. It is as if Bo heard the song and thought to himself, "that first bar, man, *that's* the shit, who really needs anything else here now?" Complexity fans will think of this decision as a dumb move, but when taken in the musical and cultural context of its time, it is a classic example of brutal, radical genius, right out there vying for first place with the likes of 'Louie Louie' and 'Blitzkrieg Bop'. In later years, the Who would be the perfect band to cover this symbol of mythic-status virility; the Yardbirds, with their wimpy singer, slightly less so; and too bad that it was too slow for Motörhead.

The trick here is that if you pay «emotional attention» to 'Hoochie Coochie Man', you might indeed notice that the song's cockiest, bossiest, most self-assertive moments are the stop-and-start part of the blues verse, whereas the "you know I'm here, everybody knows I'm here" blues chorus already feels like a small step back. 12-bar blues, after all, was not originally invented for advertising yourself as The Man Who Moves Mountains; it was more of a vehicle to express depression and melancholy than arrogance and exuberance. Thus, if you pardon the blushing analogy, does Bo Diddley become the Larry Flynt of blues to Muddy Waters' Hugh Hefner — and even Muddy himself had to adapt, retorting but a few months later with his own 'Mannish Boy', essentially the same song with slightly different lyrics. As a generally better singer than Bo, you could argue that Muddy actually made the groove sound even more imposing and convincing, but he would never have gotten the idea himself — «The Originator» was there first, forcing his teacher to acknowledge some of the new rules.

And what else did «The Originator» originate? Well, the idea of stringing the entire song on one chord, for instance, which, since we already mentioned Motörhead, is the genuine precursor to the jackhammer method of headbanging. 'Hey Bo Diddley' is done that way, but a more fabulous instance is 'Who Do You Love', with its aggressive lead lines scattered along the road — not to mention the gorgeous lyrics: "I walk 47 miles of barbed wire, I use a cobra snake for a necktie... I got a brand new chimney made on top, made out of human skull..." Not a lot of black lyricists used that sort of voodooistic

imagery as lightly as old Bo, who just rattles it off the wall at top velocity, as if chased by some speed demon. But the gamble paid off — even a band as distant from the «100% body-music» style of Bo Diddley as the Doors covered the song during their live shows. (*Question*: how does one get four doors for one telephone booth? *Answer*: write "cobra snake" and "human skull" on the walls). Of special note is Jody Williams' fast, stinging, almost venomous guitar break, as sonically close a predecessor to the classic nasty lead guitar of Mike Bloomfield as possible (for instance, if you play the original recording of 'Who Do You Love' back to back with some of Bob Dylan's legendary live recordings from Newport '65, you'll know what I'm talking about).

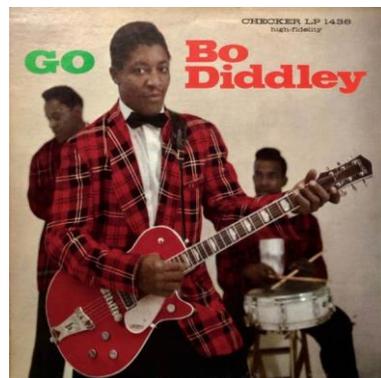
And these are just the most essential highlights of the compilation. Listing the other goodies in chronological order, there is Bo's second single 'Diddley Daddy', opening with one of the simplest, yet most elegant guitar figures of the decade — one which Billy Boy Arnold, present at the session, would nix from Bo and quickly insert in his own 'I Wish You Would', which is how all of us British Invasion fans know it (from the Yardbirds cover; 'Diddley Daddy' itself evaded hit status in the UK, although the Stones and others did play it live). From 1956, there is 'Diddey Wah Diddey', which takes an old slow «dance-blues» pattern of Muddy's, adds a playful, poppy melody resolution, and makes for an experience that is swampy, disturbing, funny, and catchy at the same time — an ideal fit for a young, teeth-cutting Captain Beefheart in 1966. And from 1957, there is 'Say Boss Man', a lesser known tune that shows Bo perfectly at home with 'Jim Dandy'-style danceable R&B. (I suppose that is Otis Spann locked into that maddeningly simplistic dum-de-dum, dum-dum-de-dum piano groove in the background, but it is hilarious to hear him try and make a break for it during the super-short instrumental section, only to be caught and locked back in his dum-de-dum cell by Bo fifteen seconds later!)

«Ingeniously simple» and «intelligently stupid» is what characterizes most of these early singles, so nicely collected for us by Chess on this 1958 compilation (note that some expanded versions of the album also add about half a dozen bonus tracks, mostly B-sides; most of them are expendable, and some are flat-out self-repetitions, e.g. 'I'm Bad', an unimpressive sequel to 'I'm A Man'). This makes Bo, similarly to his contemporary Jimmy Reed, somewhat of a sacrilegious blues renegade, but this is also precisely why we love them both — except that Jimmy Reed was perfectly happy to find one basic formula and stick to it like glue until his last teeth fell out, whereas Bo, as this album shows, was a restless seeker, and in just three years' time, he had found more than many bluesmen of the highest caliber had found in several decades.

The BDB was merely *one* of these finds, and, as the first one and the one that made him a star, it was bound to become a repetitive trademark. But there is very little that is repetitive, uninventive, or just plain boring about **Bo Diddley**, an album

where I myself knew most of the songs — typically, as covered by other artists — before hearing it. That Bo never managed to outgrow and surpass the perfection of these early singles should not reflect poorly on one's perception of them, nor on one's assessment of his artistic persona, because when we are talking about Fifties' artists, who else did, really? Just like everybody else, Ellas Bates McDaniel firmly believed that one's purpose was to find one's own special place in life, and once you've found it, hold on to it for dear life unless someone rips it out from under you. And unlike quite a few of the less lucky Fifties' artists, at least *he*, «the Originator», did find that place.





GO BO DIDDLEY

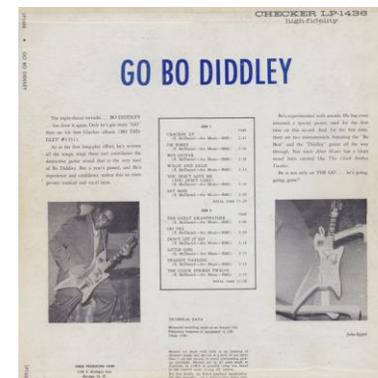
Album released:

July 1959

V A L U E

3 3 3 3 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) *Crackin' Up*; 2) *I'm Sorry*; 3) *Bo's Guitar*; 4) *Willie And Lillie*; 5) *You Don't Love Me (You Don't Care)*; 6) *Say Man*; 7) *The Great Grandfather*; 8) *Oh Yea*; 9) *Don't Let It Go*; 10) *Little Girl*; 11) *Dearest Darling*; 12) *The Clock Strikes Twelve*.

REVIEW

One might argue about whether Bo Diddley truly deserves his title of «Originator» to the exclusion of other worthy rock'n'roll heroes of the 1950s, but I do not think it is arguable that *most* of the man's «originating» can already be found compiled on his first, self-titled LP. The unwritten artistic laws of that decade clearly stated that there was literally no way in Heaven or Hell he would be able to push the boundaries of pop music even further on any of his subsequent records; and like a respectable, law-abiding citizen of the rock'n'roll district, Bo complied. Not that **Go Bo Diddley**, his second and probably second best LP of original material, should be described as «scraping the barrel». Its bulk, consisting of new singles that Bo released from late 1958 to mid-1959, unquestionably shows him trying out some new styles and directions — but the problem is that most of those new styles are not essentially *his*, and adapting them to the already established persona of Bo Diddley is a risky business that sometimes pays off, and sometimes... pays through the nose.



Although, unlike **Bo Diddley**, this record actually had four LP-only tracks that were not to be found on previously issued singles, it still makes sense to reshuffle the tracklist to reflect proper chronology. Once we dispense with 'Dearest Darling',

the B-side to 1958's 'Hush Your Mouth' which had already been included on **Bo Diddley** and probably crept its way here through sheer publishing mistake, the next single is 'Willie And Lillie' from October of the same year — a sad tale of a lady leaving her gent for love of the devil's music ("*Willie and Lillie used to live on a hill / Wasn't for rock'n'roll Lillie be there still*") with a happy ending of her coming back once the gent makes the conversion as well after "Willie's mama bought him a hi-fi, his own". While it does show that Bo has a way with introducing Mother Goose to the pleasures of the rock'n'roll lifestyle, musically it does not amount to much other than a slowed down, slightly relaxed remake of 'Hey Bo Diddley' and the like. (Somewhat more interesting was the B-side, 'Bo Meets The Monster', which put a spoof of contemporary horror movies atop a riff adapted from Larry Williams' 'Bony Moronie' and crowned it all with the first appearance of the pick-scraping technique that we all know from 'Roadrunner'. For some reason, it was not included on the LP, though).

1959 opened with what was probably Bo's weakest move up to that point — 'I'm Sorry' transparently proves that doo-wop, of all things, does not agree with Bo's personality. Not only is the production, perhaps intentionally lo-fi-stylized to echo the *early* Fifties, downright awful, with near-parodic back vocals rising out of the imaginary coal mines, but Bo Diddley as a soulful doo-wop crooner simply cannot be taken seriously. If I want to listen to the Cardinals, I'll go straight to the source; the addition of Bo's usual heavy reverb to the doo-wop guitar riff is hardly sufficient to sway my interest. For some barely explicable reason, the single did return the man to the R&B charts, for the first time ever since 1955's 'Pretty Thing' — something I can only explain by a fit of sentimental nostalgia. The B-side, 'Oh Yeah', was far more Bo Diddleyesque in nature, but that's not saying much, since the song is essentially a call-back to Muddy Waters' 'Mannish Boy', which was itself a call-back to Bo's 'I'm A Man', which was itself a call-back to Muddy's 'Hoochie Coochie Man', and it's all about as exciting as watching your favorite TV show slowly decline into repetition and self-parody with each new season.

By May 1959, things seem to pick up a little with the release of 'Crackin' Up', which was not too musically innovative, either, based on an old Afro-Cuban-style riff by Jody Williams which Bo had already exploited on 'Love Is Strange' (written for Mickey & Sylvia) and which had also served as the basis for Buddy Holly's 'Words Of Love'. But the riff does get a new coat of paint for this song, with tremolo and reverb effects giving it an oddly «oceanic» aura, and the song's harsher, crispier sound, paired with its funny Man's Lib agenda ("*I do your laundry and your cookin' too / What for a woman can a man like me do?*"), makes it a blast if played *in tandem* with either 'Love Is Strange' or 'Words Of Love' — it's like an inverted version of the latter's love-serenade atmosphere. (At the risk of incurring the wrath of Bo's defenders, I'll still go ahead and say that the genuinely crispiest version of that riff was played on Paul McCartney's **Snova V SSSR** album in 1988 — the man spared no expense back then to introduce us Russians to the sonic potential of Fifties' rock'n'roll. The Rolling Stones

also did a fine job with the song, both back in their early days and later, when they revived it in **Black And Blue**-style for the 1976 tour, as captured on the **Love You Live** album — Mick Jagger is definitely a finer candidate to sing the song than Paul, who, I imagine, would be only too glad to do Linda's laundry and cookin' back in 1988).

'Crackin' Up' was fine, but its B-side, 'The Great Grandfather', was probably more surprising: here, Bo steps up to take on something *really* archaic — ye olde working song — and this is a style which he tackles with far more conviction and spirit than doo-wop. Perhaps his moans and groans that bookend the verses are not nearly as authentic as, say, Leadbelly's, but at least he makes up for that with plenty of animalistic intensity. Interestingly, this is the first song in Bo's catalog to feature almost no guitar (except for the dissonant, choppy, crude instrumental break): the melody is carried entirely by the minimalistic rhythm section, with Otis Spann adding a quiet, sadly rollicking piano part in the background. If you look hard at the lyrics, it is difficult to take the song seriously — it is more of a parody on the Old Frontier Settler stereotype ("*when the times got hard and the redskins smart / said his prayers with the shotgun cocked*") with special focus on the importance of sowing one's oats ("*twenty-one children, came to be blessed... the great grand-pappy was a busy man*"); but if you *don't* look too hard, you might just get a vision of Mr. Bo humming it somewhere in a ditch, breaking rocks like there was no tomorrow. A strange and funny guy he was, Mr. Bo.

The single was another small hit, keeping Bo's presence active on the charts, but his hugest win for 1959 did not come until the end of the year, already after the release of the LP, when one of its new songs was singled out for solo release — this was 'Say Man', on which Bo and his maracas shaker Jerome Green trade off silly jokes and friendly mutual insults to a samba beat. This was yet another first — a mixture of time-honored «African-American comedy», going back to the Dozens game, and new-fangled R&B that all the white kids around the world must have been really thrilled to hear. (That said, the actual jokes are really dumb; they should have hired some of Louis Jordan's songwriters instead. Bo says that the producers took out all the dirtiest bits, though, which is... just sad). Tame and dated as it feels now, 'Say Man' is often called a spiritual predecessor to rap music, and it certainly *was* the first recording of its kind — whether that's a good or a bad thing is not for me to decide, but I guess the general public was quite thrilled, as the single rose to #20 on the general pop charts, an achievement Bo Diddley would never be able to top.

Musically, I would say, it is the B-side that takes precedence: 'The Clock Strikes Twelve' starts out deceptively as yet another variation on the 'Hoochie Coochie Man' theme, before turning into a slow instrumental 12-bar blues jam with Bo playing the *violin* — it's safe to say that Heifetz or Menuhin probably would not be impressed by his technique, but for a few

moments out there, I am ashamed — or thrilled? — to say that I could not actually understand if it really *was* a violin, or if it was some trickily produced inventive part blown by Little Walter on his harmonica. With more of that quirky Otis Spann piano and Bo going from bowing to pizzicato and back, in a way, the jam has more of a roll-over-Beethoven vibe than Chuck Berry ever offered, but, of course, in the long run it's still more of an escape-from-routine-boredom thing for Bo than a revolutionary and influential musical creation.

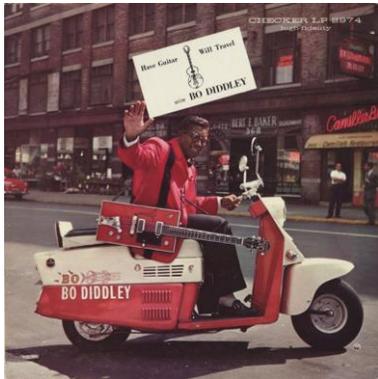
The remaining four LP-only tracks, predictably, deserve only passable mention. 'Little Girl' seems to intrude on the turf of New Orleanian barroom players from Professor Longhair to Fats Domino, and just as he is not much of a doo-wop singer, Bo does not quite master the sort of nonchalant drunken swagger that it takes to make these things loveable, so just give it a quick listen and go back to the real thing instead (why should one subject oneself to *repeated* listens of Bo Diddley trying to sound like Fats Domino? at least Fats Domino never tried to make you listen to him sounding like Bo Diddley). 'You Don't Love Me' is the ever-on-the-watchout Bo stealing the carpet from under the feet of Slim Harpo — a variation on 'Got Love If You Want It' which, in terms of sharpness, energy, and professionalism, destroys the original completely, yet it still did not help Bo expropriate the original (UK bands like the Kinks and the Yardbirds still got stuck covering Slim Harpo). 'Don't Let It Go' is just another variation on the never-ending 'Diddley Daddy' / 'Say Boss Man' / 'Willie And Lillie' pattern, a fact subtly acknowledged in the mantra-form chorus ("hold on to what you got but don't let go!").

Best of the four is another instrumental, 'Bo's Guitar', which combines a variation on the Diddley beat with shards of twangy surf-style melodies — supposedly, Bo the Omnivorous must have kept one ear open to Duane Eddy's recent hits — and then goes into proto-noise-rock territory, with the man trying to extract as much sonic diversity from his instrument as was technically possible for 1959. There wasn't a *lot* of things yet that were technically possible, but I can imagine that this was the kind of music to inspire young Pete Townshends and Jimi Hendrixes all around the globe: the very idea that you can just fool around with the guitar any way you please while your rhythm section does all the disciplined hard work.

Looking back on all these descriptions, I feel like maybe I ought to take back the review's opening phrase, yet in the end I think I shall still stick with it. One reason is that Bo does seem to bite off a bit more than he can actually chew — best proof of that being the failed doo-wop experiment of 'I'm Sorry' and the unconvincing New Orleanian stylizations of 'Little Girl' — and the other is that this time around, new ideas creep in more subtly, rather than bursting in on a here's-Johnny! note. In fact, most of his actual innovations in 1959 are on the verbal side, from the Mother Goose influence on 'Willie And Lillie' to the monster-movie stuff of 'Bo Meets The Monster' to the spoken insult game of 'Say Man'; and those which are not, like the

violin on 'Clock Strikes Twelve' and the chunks of noise on 'Bo's Guitar', take a while to sink in as genuine examples of musical experimentation — whereas the melodic dependence on riffs and patterns already introduced in 1955-1958 is nearly always obvious right off the bat. Still, compared to many, *many* of his peers who couldn't put out more than 3–4 completely original songs without spending the rest of their career re-writing them in inferior versions, Bo Diddley's sophomore record is a relative triumph: one of the best rock'n'roll collections of 1959, the year that the lucky star alignment was lost and staying true to the exciting spirit of rock'n'roll became a heavy chore for most of its practitioners. Not good old Bo, though. You don't get *this* guy turning into a black Bobby Darin just because being wild and crazy temporarily went out of fashion after «the day the music died».





HAVE GUITAR WILL TRAVEL

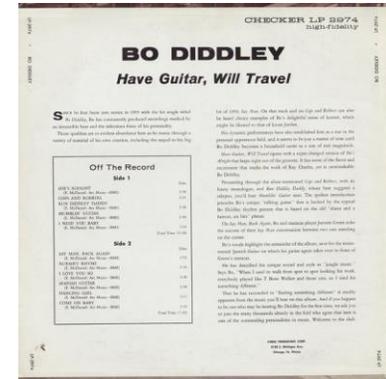
Album released:

V A L U E

January 1960

2 3 3 2 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) She's Alright; 2) Cops And Robbers; 3) Run Diddley Daddy; 4) Mumblin' Guitar; 5) I Need You Baby; 6) Say Man, Back Again; 7) Nursery Rhyme; 8) I Love You So; 9) Spanish Guitar; 10) Dancing Girl; 11) Come On Baby.

REVIEW

Bo Diddley opened up the Sixties with his first LP that could be more or less justifiably called an «original album» rather than a «compilation»: two of the songs were taken from his most recent single, seven were recorded specifically for the LP, and only two more were pulled out of the archival pile: somehow, 'Cops And Robbers' from late 1956 and 'Mona', the original B-side to 'Hey! Bo Diddley' from 1957 (retitled here as 'I Need You Baby') had previously avoided the 12-inch treatment, so they were recalled out of retirement to pad out the empty space on the record (which, even with both of them, is still barely half an hour long).



Unfortunately, in terms of easily recognizable «golden oldies» the record lags far behind Bo's two LPs from the Fifties, and even behind quite a few of the succeeding releases. 'Mona' is probably the one with which most people are familiar, largely due to the Stones' cover on their own debut LP — its special secret is that it combines the standard danceable Bo Diddley beat with an element of soulful romanticism, being more of a serenade than a braggadocio, and consequently, is guaranteed to work on cool chicks rather than cool cats for a change. The "Hey, Mona! – woah, Mona!" refrain has a sort of strange magic that makes it more memorable than almost any other such incantation in Bo's catalog — maybe it's just the element

of nagging insistence, so natural to the heart of every hormone-driven teenager and so sublimely captured in this ritualistic chorus. Not to mention how well the line "*listen to my heart go bumpity-bump*" agrees with the rhythm of the song.

'Cops And Robbers', for some reason, also attracted the attention of at least some of the trans-Atlantic rockers, having been covered by the Downliners Sect and Wayne Fontana in the Sixties, and also played by the Stones (not released officially at the time, but regularly played live in the early days — you can have yourself a live version from the BBC sessions). However, it is more of a repetitive musical anecdote than a song, and feels like Bo needed to do something in the style of Chuck Berry — but couldn't, so he borrowed a tune released by minor songwriter Kent Harris, who originally cut it with his backing band as «[Boogaloo And His Gallant Crew](#)» in September 1956 (curious coincidence: one of the chorus lines goes "*don't try no monkey business*", and Chuck's 'Too Much Monkey Business' also came out in September 1956!). The problem is, neither the Kent Harris original nor the Bo Diddley cover are particularly exciting on a musical level (at least the Harris version has some nice piano playing for it), and not tremendously funny on a lyrical level; overall, Bo Diddley's (or, more accurately, Kent Harris') sense of humor has nothing on Chuck's, so this is a battle Bo was bound to lose.

As for the newer material, well... rather tellingly, the album was organized around a single whose A-side was a full-on rehash of 'Say Man' called 'Say Man, Back Again' — if you loved those friendly jokes and insults the first time around, here's a second dose for you! ("*Where you from?*" — "*South America!*" — "*You don't look like no South American to me!*" — "*I'm still from South America!*" — "*What part?*" — "*South Texas!*" — har har har!) — and whose B-side was a long, energetic, aggressive groove ('She's Alright') that shows Bo had been paying serious attention to the success of the Isley Brothers. Give the band plenty of credit for being able to blow the roof off the house — but, perhaps, keep that «Originator» tag in the back drawer for the moment. (Fun fact: the original single version of 'She's Alright' was relatively short and featured a minimum of backing vocals, but the LP version was extended and embellished with multiple vocal overdubs to create more of a party atmosphere — not sure if it helps).

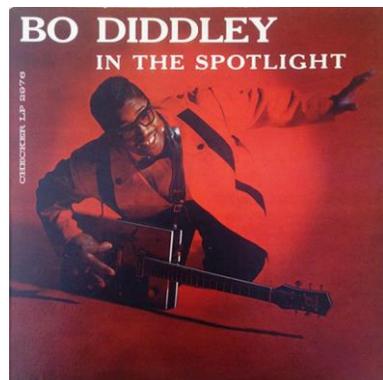
Still, as a whole, the new material is not completely worthless or hopeless. Two of the tracks are instrumental, and both are fairly inspired: 'Mumblin' Guitar' is built around the gimmick of Bo «muffling» his sound by running his axe through some weird sonic devices (not sure of the technical details) so as to make it «talk», and 'Spanish Guitar', also true to its title, has the man trying to integrate some flamenco chords into the usual Diddley beat, with interesting, if somewhat puzzling, results. Perhaps the chief virtue of both tracks is that they show the man still willing to experiment — in pure enjoyment terms, the gimmick of 'Mumblin' Guitar' becomes predictably tiring after the first minute, whereas the combination of

Andalusian romanticism with African tribal rituals... well, it might work for *somebody* on a gut level, but I don't really feel as if it were the most organic mix in the world. But it's always good to expand one's horizons, that's for sure.

Of the new vocal numbers, 'Dancing Girl' may attract special attention due to the lead guitar work — I don't know if it's Bo himself or his trusty sidekick, Peggy «Lady Bo» Jones (for some reason, I just hope it might be the lady), but while the song itself is just a variation on 'Diddle Daddy', those intense breaks between verses are... intense. Remember Dylan's 'Maggie's Farm' and how Mike Bloomfield's hystrionic mini-breaks between each verse add so much to the song's aggression level? That can certainly be traced back to the likes of 'Dancing Girl', where each of the half-sung, half-spoken tense-as-hell verses is «signed off» with an equally tense, sharp-ringing guitar flourish. 'I Love You So' and 'Come On Baby' are less aggressive and more party-friendly, but both also feature some juicy-thick distorted guitar work, especially the latter with its almost metallic riff running throughout the song, hilariously contrasting with the jolly minimalistic lyrics.

Still, there is no need to pretend that **Have Guitar Will Travel** turns over some new leaf in the musical history of Bo Diddley. With the coming of the Sixties, «The Originator» more or less morphed into «The Adaptator», keeping, perhaps, a sharper ear to the ground than many, if not most, of his Fifties' peers but using these new fads and influences to refuel his already existing formula rather than come up with any new ones. And since the early Sixties were not particularly hot on *progressive* new fads and influences, it is no surprise that there was relatively little fuel around to keep that formula as fresh, hot, and nutritious as it was just a couple of years ago. From here on, Bo's LPs — particularly now that he was actually recording them as LPs, which required more material and, consequently, more *filler* material — would become patchy and disappointing, though never disappointing to the point of needing to be ignored. The man did learn how to cope with the «Fifties' Curse» a bit better than everybody else, but to be altogether immune to it would require a miracle, and for that, Bo Diddley found himself ineligible.





IN THE SPOTLIGHT

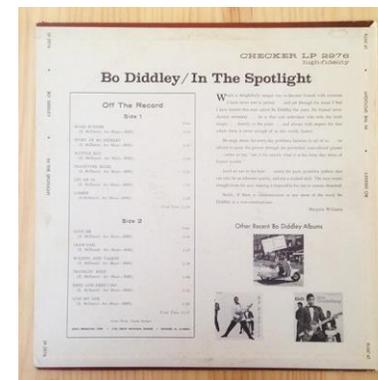
Album released:

July 1960

V A L U E

3 2 3 2 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) **Road Runner**; 2) Story Of Bo Diddley; 3) Scuttle Bug; 4) Signifying Blues; 5) Let Me In; 6) Limber; 7) Love Me; 8) Craw-Dad; 9) Walkin' And Talkin'; 10) Travellin' West; 11) Deed And Deed I Do; 12) Live My Life.

REVIEW

Perhaps it would be unfair, after all, to poke fun at Bo Diddley for letting his creative well of ideas run all dry when the clock struck twelve on the last day of the previous decade. It's more like he was not too quick to grasp the true potential of this new LP medium. Imagine this — you used to enter the studio to record just *two* songs and be done with it, and now they're expecting you to enter the studio and cut *twelve* of these fuckers! Even if you stretch it out (**In The Spotlight** was actually comprised from eight months' worth of various recording sessions), you can't really be expected to be creatively inspired every time you drag your ass to the studio, right? I mean, even Mozart and Beethoven wrote shitloads of variations on their own themes, so give The Originator a break here.



At least, unlike **Have Guitar Will Travel**, **In The Spotlight** has *one* unquestionable absolute classic on it. Taking the original riff of 'Lucille', slowing it down and removing one note at the end to give the thing a bit more gravity and heaviness, Bo comes up with perhaps the greatest ode to motorbiking written up to date — using the Road Runner character from Looney Tunes (with his trademark *beep beep!*) to draw you in. The actual musical — or, perhaps more accurately, *sonic* —

hook of the song is that entrancingly odd effect of the guitar string being «skinned alive» as Bo imitates the sound of a motorbike dashing past the listener, over and over, a classy gimmick whose smooth transition into the song's riff probably made many a British kid at the time pick their jaw off the floor; it is, in fact, one of the most vivid exploits of the electric guitar's world-building potential prior to Hendrix, and pretty damn difficult to pick up properly.

(The Rolling Stones, for instance, never learned to do it; their [unreleased version from 1963](#) instead features a rather measly «up-the-stairway» progression which does indeed prove that they can't keep up with the fastest in the land. Nor could [The Zombies](#), for that matter, who try to wiggle their way out of it with a set of distorted trills, getting a little closer to the required goal but still stalling and spluttering. Only The Animals, back in the day, receive an [A+ for effort](#) — and with the addition of Alan Price's organ and Eric Burdon's vocals, come up with the definitive cover; although, in terms of sheer noise and ruckus, you can hardly beat the classic [Who live version](#) from 1975 — who but Pete Townshend, the supreme Grand Torturer of the electric guitar, could properly improve upon the Originator's engine-in-overdrive thing?).

Mood-wise, 'Road Runner' is really the same old shit — hyperbolic, but humorous self-aggrandizing with lyrics working in tandem with the instrumental backing — but it is really the *sound* of it that counts, that heavy and lumbering vibe created by Bo's and Peggy Jones' guitars working in tandem (note that there is no separate bass guitar on the recording! at least I don't really hear one, and there is none listed in the liner notes), combined with Clifton James' massive bass drum pounding. This is basically the 1960 equivalent of the massive Led Zeppelin groove of 1968 — not at all the kind of sound typically associated with Bo Diddley, who, up until then, usually preferred to soar up in the air rather than making it feel as if he were trying to drill a hole into the center of the Earth. But even so, this is arguably Bo Diddley's biggest contribution to the future genres of hard rock and heavy metal, and even with The Animals and The Who rising up to the challenge, the original version still remains the "fastest in the land".

And now the line you've all been waiting for: too bad there is absolutely nothing on the *rest* of the album to even remotely match the power, the fun, and the innovation of its opening title. And this is not an exaggeration — *every* other track is a piece of filler. Sometimes boring filler, sometimes silly filler, sometimes enjoyable filler, but each and every one of these other eleven recordings is a variation on Bo's past glories, dragging us back in time rather than beep-beeping us forward like 'Road Runner' does. When was the last time you saw 'Limber' or 'Craw-Dad' or 'Live My Life' on a Best-Of Bo Diddley compilation? That's right — no-when, that's when.

Okay, correction: most of the Chess compilations actually include at least the original B-side to 'Road Runner', called 'My

Story' on the single release and later renamed to 'The Story Of Bo Diddley'. (Not to be confused with The Animals' later own 'Story Of Bo Diddley', which would be more centered around the band's own relationship with the man than his personal biography). However, it can hardly be argued that the song's only bit of importance is in its autobiographical detail (or, should we rather say, *automythological* detail — "I come in this world playing a gold guitar" isn't exactly something that could be properly fact-checked) — otherwise, it's basically just 'Dearest Darling' with a new set of lyrics, as much as I always like to hear Otis Spann add his crystal-clear piano runs to Bo's jamming.

Elsewhere, we have 'Live My Life', which is a new version of 'Before You Accuse Me', with fairly appropriate lyrics to boot: "If I could live my life, I'd live it all over again" — Bo states with just a pinch of syntactic inaccuracy and a whole load of commitment to this particular mission, because even before the song gets started, it has *already* been lived all over again in the form of 'Scuttle Bug', an instrumental mix of the exact same performance with wiped vocals and added extra piano lines from Spann. I love Mr. Spann and his piano playing on 'Scuttle Bug' is beautiful (some Fats Domino echoes in here, but with a prettier, clinkier timbre), yet really, why put it in our face in such an obvious manner? And does the world really need *another* sequel to 'Say Man' ('Signifying Blues')? Around this time, Bo seems to have had enough insults accumulated for a whole book, which would at least mark a more original approach to the matter.

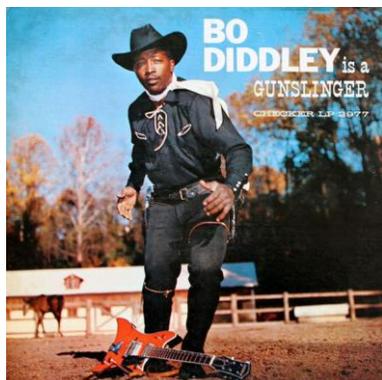
A couple of these things take a little more time to unravel; for instance, 'Walkin' And Talkin' makes absolutely no sense until you realize that it is really Bo's strange idea of a thematic sequel to the Coasters' 'Along Came Jones' — the original song starts out with "I plopped down in my easy chair and turned on Channel 2", while Bo's verse changes this "ploppin' down in my easy chair, tunin' on Channel 3". Apparently, in Bo's vision poor Sweet Sue from the original song has developed some sort of Stockholm syndrome and is now actively working on rescuing her former stalker (Salty Sam, though he remains unnamed in this sequel) from legal persecution — I am not sure if there is some moral lesson to be learned from this, but I *am* sure that by slowing down the tempo, getting rid of the yakety-sax, and adding a new repetitive chorus Bo made the whole thing about ten times less interesting than the Coasters. Oh well, at least this time around he tried to riff on somebody *else's* ideas rather than his own.

Another thing that may be hard for us to understand unless we were there at the time is 'Limber', which is Bo's specially curated «uneducated» transcription of 'Limbo', the brand new dance from the Trinidad area that was just beginning to replace the calypso craze in the States. Bo would be among the very first artists to capitalize a bit on that craze — way before Chubby Checker's 'Limbo Rock' or Duke Ellington's 'Limbo Jazz' — but, unless I am very much mistaken, his idea of the

limbo dance is way different from the fast, energetic representation on, for instance, '[Limbo](#)' by Little Anthony & The Imperials. Bo prefers to take it slow and easy, decelerating one of his own rhythms and ultimately presenting the whole thing as more of a send-up of the new fad than a tribute to it. The end result is not so much groovy as monotonous, and not as much funny as annoying.

In the end, the only other track that I find somewhat exquisitely fun is 'Deed And Deed I Do', which mainly gets by because (a) it is fast and groovy and (b) I appreciate the contrast between the high-pitched wailing guitar in the intro and the «mumbling» bass-heavy guitar concluding each of the verses. Again, it's more comical than anything else, but Bo Diddley's bits of musical comedy, when they succeed, always transcend the silly-novelty stage — the tone, the echo, the energy, all of that stuff just can't be beat. It's just that you only find them on two or three tracks here. Perhaps that is precisely what he meant (not really) when choosing the title for the album — there's 'Road Runner' **In The Spotlight** for you, and then there's everything else that is, by definition, *not* in the spotlight.





BO DIDDLEY IS A GUNSLINGER

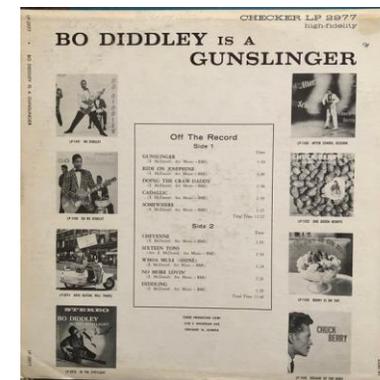
Album released:

November 15, 1960

V A L U E

3 2 3 1 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) Gunslinger; 2) Ride On Josephine; 3) Doing The Craw-Daddy; 4) Cadillac; 5) Somewhere; 6) Cheyenne; 7) Sixteen Tons; 8) Whoa Mule (Shine); 9) No More Lovin'; 10) Diddling; 11*) Working Man; 12*) Do What I Say; 13*) Prisoner Of Love; 14*) Googlia Moo; 15*) Better Watch Yourself.

REVIEW

You certainly gotta give Bo some credit for closing out 1960 with a *third* LP of mostly «original» material (the quotation marks are important, though) — even if the ten tracks on the original LP barely amount to 25 minutes; no pop artist from the same era was capable of matching such an achievement. It is almost as if some sixth sense took over, insinuating that Bo Diddley's grand mission in 1960 was to save rock'n'roll from extinction and that, in order to do that, he had to work thrice as hard as he used to — to make up both for himself and for all those rockers who'd died, crashed, burned out, or mellowed out in the great catastrophe of 1959-60. Unfortunately, this was exactly what it was: *work*. The same crisis that affected all of those Bo Diddley's peers that he was stepping in for affected Bo just as well — and **Bo Diddley Is A Gunslinger** is a perfect example of this, a record that features plenty of well-crafted *invention* but almost zero *inspiration*.



In retrospect, the record does have a rather surprisingly high reputation, with many critics and fans alike referring to it with what seems to me like somewhat inadequate warmth and affection. It sometimes finds its way onto lists of best albums from 1960 or the early 1960s in general, is often praised for the diversity and energy of its tracks, and a few of the songs

would later get covered by UK artists (for that matter, the LP itself originally charted as high as #20 in the UK, which was an absolute record for Bo at the time). This singling-out feels weird to me, because essentially, **Bo Diddley Is A Gunslinger** shares exactly the same flaws and virtues as any other Bo Diddley LP from around the same time — except that it does not contain even a single truly outstanding number of the ‘Road Runner’ variety.

It is possible that some of this mild admiration is triggered by the album’s funny and slightly daring concept. Expanding upon the theme that he initiated with ‘Walkin’ and Talkin’ on his previous LP, Bo makes this one into a «semi-conceptual» record, a part of which revolves around classic Western themes — only a small part, mind you, but enough to pique our curiosity about such a quintessentially African-American performer as Bo Diddley encroaching upon such a quintessentially white artistic genre as the Western. Whoever heard about a black gunslinger back in 1960, anyway? (Not that there *weren’t* any — history has preserved quite a few interesting examples for us, from Bass Reeves to Isam Dart — but clearly, whatever you can scrape up will still always be the exception rather than the rule).

In theory, this does sound like a promising idea — cross the Bo Diddley beat with all sorts of country-western themes — and it could have aligned well with the agenda of other black artists, such as Ray Charles laying his own claim to the Great American Songbook and the folk / country traditions of white rural America. *In practice*, however, the concept essentially remains limited to the album cover (but who dropped that guitar on the poor gunslinger’s crushed foot?) and no more than three songs: title track, ‘Cheyenne’, and ‘Whoa Mule’. Of these, ‘Gun Slinger’ is little more than yet another variation on the ‘Bo Diddley’ groove, with appropriately «Western-ized» lyrics ("*When Bo Diddley come to town / The streets get empty and the sun go down*") and a fairly standard and predictable amount of grooving energy on the band’s part — no less and no more than usual. There’s not even any traces of guitar solos or any special sonic pyrotechnics: just a basic groove stretched out over two minutes. The only idea is that we are supposed to go crazy over the idea that "*Bo Diddley’s a gunslinger*", but since we know all too well that he really is not, the fantasy ends up in the mediocre tier.

It gets even more baffling with ‘Cheyenne’, an unfinished and unfunny cowboy story which *once again* draws its musical and lyrical «inspiration» from the Coasters’ ‘Along Came Jones’, this time fully ripping off the verse melody and the "*and then?...*" bridge. The lyrics are precisely the kind of thing that emerges when somebody without the talent of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller is motivated by jealousy to write something in the style of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, and the music is... well, honestly, I’d simply much prefer a direct cover of ‘Along Came Jones’, just to see what Bo Diddley could do with it, rather than this crude and clumsy re-write. The best thing about the song is its oddly psychedelic extra percussion layer — I

have no idea if it's someone fiddling around with marimbas or using some sort of prepared electric piano, but it's a cool sonic addition, unfortunately wasted on this complete turkey of a song.

Completing this «Western trilogy» is 'Whoa Mule (Shine)', perhaps the most musically interesting number of the three, though this ain't saying much: essentially a cross between a classic, slightly sped-up, doo-wop chord sequence, a classic Bo Diddley tell-tale verse, and a chorus that adapts a classic country-western cliché to the realities of a new age of music. The «story» is predictably unfunny and its moral is left hanging high up in the air (we had a mule, I liked the mule, the mule liked me, the mule wrecked our wagon, papa tried to shoot the mule, the mule ran away — *END OF STORY!*), and the music reveals all its secrets in the first five seconds. But, uh, whatever rocks your saddle, Mr. Gunslinger.

Okay, so you'd think maybe Bo was just so enamoured of this new invented personality of his, he thought that the very *idea* of «Bo Diddley going West» would be enough to redeem any track on which it was promulgated. But the problem is that the «non-Western» songs on the album usually do not fare any better. Thus, 'Ride On Josephine', which I have many times seen lauded as a highlight, is essentially a hybridization of Chuck Berry's 'Thirty Days' (chorus) with 'Maybellene' (verse, and I don't mean just the melody — Bo more or less nicked the storyline as well). So what? — people might ask; ethical moments aside (such as not giving Chuck any songwriting credits), what's wrong with Bo Diddley covering not one, but two Chuck Berry classics at the same time? What's wrong — or, maybe, not wrong, but simply disappointing — is that Bo slows down the original tempo, deletes the original solos, replaces the original funny lyrics with crude, meaningless simulations, and basically does not produce a single musical argument about why I should ever bother listening to these inferior shadows of far more exciting originals.

Ironically, when he *does* offer credit (just once on the entire album!), the results are even worse. 'Sixteen Tons', that Merle Travis / Tennessee Ernie Ford classic about the grueling hardships of a coal miner's life, appears on the album in an utterly reinvented and utterly ruined version — sped up and set to a typical Bo Diddley groove, the song becomes an upbeat dance number, completely dumping the original's gloomy, agonizing atmosphere. To salvage at least a little something, Bo sings most of the lyrics with clenched teeth and a deep growl, as if this were a song of revolution rather than one of resignation. Needless to say, it doesn't work and only makes things worse. You couldn't fuck up more if you re-arranged 'Eleanor Rigby' as a happy polka dance number.

And I have not even mentioned the worst offender yet: 'Doing The Crawdaddy', a sort of thematic sequel to last album's 'Craw-Dad', only this time the added gimmick is a nagging pseudo-children's choir, chanting the song's title in the most

obnoxious and irritating sort of way over and over while Daddy Bo is providing his «kids» with the proper instructions to master this brand new dance. Do you *enjoy* hearing the likes of "na-na-na-na-NAAA-nah!" for three minutes? Then this song is for you, especially because there doesn't seem to be much of anything else to it.

In the end, there are just *two* tracks on here that I might be willing to single out and salvage for eternity. One is 'Cadillac', another lightweight joke number distinguished by a sharper, crunchier, juicier guitar tone than almost anything else on here and some great sax work from Gene Barge. No more original than any other Bo Diddley-beat number, it is at least an example of a formula working well — not nearly as repetitive as 'Gun Slinger', featuring better use of the backing vocals than 'Crawdaddy' (the call-and-response between Bo's lines and "C-A-D-I-L-L-A-C" is an aurally pleasing groove in comparison), and with a quirky, satisfying chorus resolution to the verses. At the very least, this song has some fun potential, something that The Kinks would perceive when they recorded a sped-up, slightly «poppified» version of it for their 1964 self-titled debut (replacing saxophone with harmonica).

The other okay number is the final instrumental 'Diddling', which, incidentally, is *also* based on the interplay between Bo's stormy guitar playing and Gene Barge's saxophone parts. The two occasionally merge in a wonderful wall-of-sound, predating the future heights of excitement to which raunchy electric guitar and sax duets would soon be taken by garage bands like The Sonics; not sure if there are any compositional advances here, but the saxophone is precisely the ingredient that was needed to update and reinvigorate the Bo Diddley groove. Too bad it remained so drastically underused on all the other tracks.

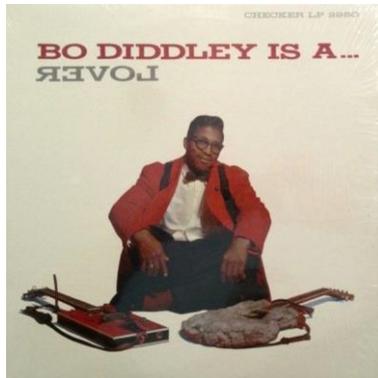
Subsequent CD reissues of the album threw on from two to five extra bonus tracks, recorded during the same sessions and, rather predictably, suffering from the same issues — thus, 'Do What I Say' is another variation on 'Diddley Daddy', 'Googlia Moo' is another variation on 'Diddy Wah Diddy', and 'Better Watch Yourself' is another variation on the 'I'm A Man' / 'Manish Boy' groove. The oddest and most outstanding bonus track is Bo's take on the old popular song 'Prisoner Of Love', which he rearranges as some sort of a cross between a typical Bo Diddley number and a soulful Mexican ballad, ending up with a weird hybrid sound — unfortunately, the song still remains a «novelty».

In conclusion, I might be a little harsh on the album here (I actually gave it a *positive* review back in 2012!), but I think the best compliment that I could give it at the moment is that Bo himself feels perfectly happy doing it — I think he himself must have been seriously convinced that he was really doing something cool here, rather than merely rearranging old ideas in a new order. The grooves are as tight as usual, the voice is as youthful and energetic as usual, the arrangements are truer

to the rock'n'roll idiom than just about any album released in 1960 — what's not to like? At this point, it may really have seemed as if Bo Diddley was the only classic rocker from the 1950s to escape the 1959-60 stylistic grinder relatively unscathed — sure, out of new musical ideas (replacing them with baffling lyrical and image-related concepts), but keeping the flame largely intact, in comparison with most of his old competitors.

The bottomline is that for the standards of late 1960, **Bo Diddley Is A Gunslinger** served its mission fairly well, and it did offer the small group of «rock'n'roll survivors», as well as the starving kids over across the Atlantic, a tiny ray of hope that things weren't nearly quite as «over» with the rock'n'roll revolution as the almighty Establishment would want the world to believe. For the standards of rock music as a whole, though, the album is an almost pathetically mediocre offering. It is quite telling that not a single track off it is typically featured on Chess' single-disc best-of compilations of the artist, and equally telling that, apart from The Kinks with 'Cadillac' and a few latecomers (like George Thorogood, who did a totally rearranged hard rock cover of 'Ride On Josephine' in the 1970s), pretty much nobody ever cared about covering these songs — not even such hardcore Bo Diddley fans as The Animals.





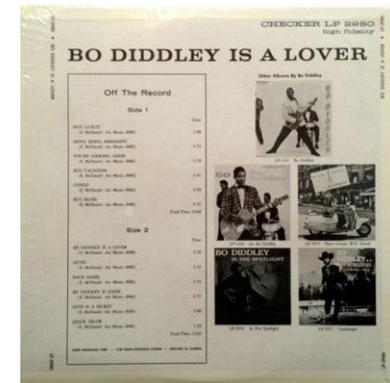
BO DIDDLEY IS A LOVER

Album released:

February 1961

V A L U E
2 3 3 1 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) Not Guilty; 2) Hong Kong, Mississippi; 3) You're Looking Good; 4) Bo's Vacation; 5) Congo; 6) Bo's Blues; 7) Bo Diddley Is A Lover; 8) Aztec; 9) Back Home; 10) Bo Diddley Is Loose; 11) Love Is A Secret; 12) Quick Draw.

REVIEW

The scarce-as-heck assessments of **Bo Diddley Is A Lover** (the music, that is, not the actual potential of Bo Diddley as a lover, which is a bit hard to judge based exclusively on his songs), from the brief raving review of Bruce Eder at the All-Music Guide to anonymous comments on RYM and the like, would all make you believe that **Bo Diddley Is A Lover** is some unjustly forgotten and seriously underrated masterpiece. Even my own original review of it gave the album a thumbs up, concluding that "*the man is still willing to combine brains, brawn, soul, and ego to good effect*", a rather meaningless phrase that could describe a thousand ships. I guess I was in a good mood and wanted to say something nice, so don't judge too harshly.



Now that I took a couple more listens to this, surprisingly the *only* LP that Bo put up in 1961 after his triple punch of 1960, I think that the only correct positive recommendation to make is an Amazon-style formula: «If you liked **Bo Diddley**, **Go Bo Diddley**, **Bo Diddley In The Spotlight**, and **Bo Diddley Is A Gunslinger**, you might like **Bo Diddley Is A Lover**». Then again, maybe not. At the very least, **Spotlight** had one immortal classic ('Roadrunner'), and **Gunslinger** had an amusing semi-concept that came through only occasionally, but was still a fun concept. **Bo Diddley Is A Lover**

does not have a single song that would have its own strong identity, and the concept... well, emphasizing the fact that a big black guy playing the Devil's music and singing about hot chicks since 1955 is a «lover» would be the same as, say, a certain guy from Pink Floyd announcing his next album as *Roger Waters Is An Asshole*. What's the big surprise?

Perhaps we might be expected to admire «The Originator» simply for sticking to his guns at an age when rock'n'roll was temporarily going out of style and the wild men of the Fifties were expected to «mature», soften up, and re-orient their output at audiences that craved craft and gloss over aggressive energy. Looking at the album from that point of view and in that particular musical context of 1961, **Bo Diddley Is A Lover** does indeed rock harder than almost anything else put out in the States that year. But Bo Diddley's blessing-and-curse is a lot like Lemmy's: he is just what he is, and changing *too* much is impossible for him on a physiological level. What *could* he have turned into if he ever decided to sell out — Ben E. King? Impossible. Admiring Bo Diddley for refusing to change his spots is a waste of admiration mana.

Let's just look at a few of the songs instead. The album opener and the album's only single was 'Not Guilty', whose main point of interest are probably the lyrics and a little bit of theatricality — this time, Bo arranges the usual call-and-response vocals between himself and his backup singers, The Impalas, as a mock-trial session, where The Impalas impersonate the jury ("*why do women bow at your feet?*") and our man himself puts up his defence ("*just to hear me holler 'hey Bo Diddley!'*"). The gimmick is a bit amusing, but music-wise, there is nothing going on here that we have not already heard half a dozen times. Perhaps Bo thought that people would be amused, but those few who did buy the single must have been pretty befuddled with dialog like "*Did you kill a man named Bob?*" — "*To make my baby a Sunday coat*". It's good to know Bo Diddley has a sense of irony, but it feels a bit... misplaced, perhaps. I mean, when we're on the subject of famous people subjected to public scrutiny, Britney Spears' 'Piece Of Me' sort of makes sense in 2007, but Bo Diddley's 'Not Guilty' hardly makes any in 1961. It's not even an Elvis-type situation.

Much more interesting was the B-side: 'Aztec' takes the Latin-influenced side of such Bo Diddley's songs as 'Crackin' Up' and expands it to a full-fledged foray into Mexican territory (cue the name), with an experimental solo that is mostly composed of disjointed, choppy, twangy, sliding licks creating a proto-psychedelic feel. Rumor has it that the song, despite being credited to Bo as usual, was actually written by «Lady Bo» — Peggy Jones — and that she played all the rhythm and lead guitar parts herself; I am not sure that the sources are credible but surely there would be nothing impossible about it, given Peggy's overall musical reputation. Given that 'Aztec' is unquestionably the album's most creative composition, settling this question some day would be important, but since both involved parties are already dead, we'll have to wait until

we join them both in Heaven to conduct a proper confrontation. Until then, we can only guess how all those albums might have sounded like if the Bo Diddley / Peggy Jones partnership was more of an actual partnership and less of a «look-at-me-I'm-so-cool, I-have-a-chick-playing-guitar-in-my-band» sort of situation.

Anyway, speaking of instrumentals, they are arguably the most interesting songs on the album: in addition to 'Aztec', there is also 'Congo', which threatens to be just an instrumental recreation of 'Roadrunner' in the opening bars but then quickly turns into a piece of exciting twangy rockabilly that probably does not have much to do with 'Congo' but has everything to do with, let's say, Bo Diddley playing Chuck Berry with a typically Bo Diddley sound (well, maybe a little Duane Eddy for good measure as well). The same approach is later applied to 'Quick Draw' which ends the album, although the sound on that one is less deep and more thin than on 'Congo'.

Alas, when we return to the vocal numbers, they all follow the formula of 'Not Guilty': more theater, more story-telling, more (questionable) humor, fewer fresh musical ideas. 'Hong Kong, Mississippi' is a variation on 'Who Do You Love' with new lyrics that tell the story of Bo picking up a girl from «Hong Kong» only to find out, in fact, that we're talking cotton fields instead of rice paddies. If the idea was to send up both Chinese and Southern stereotypes at the same time... well, as a famous Chinese philosopher once said to his opponent, "*the teacher's goals are noble indeed, but the teacher's methods leave a lot to be desired*". 'Bo's Vacation' is the next-in-line (seriously, I've long since lost count) in the endless series of 'Say Man' retreads, this time, though, trading in the mutual insult lines with a bunch of insinuations on conjugal infidelity — not funny and not memorable. And the title track is 'Diddley Daddy' with lyrics that show the well truly running dry: "*I'm a lover like they say / I can love my baby both night and day*" seriously does not tell you anything about Bo Diddley that you haven't already been carrying around in your head for six years.

The only redeeming aspect of it all — and probably the one aspect responsible for Bruce Eder and others' kind words — is that Bo keeps on launching into those endless streams of self-repetition with so much verve and energy, you'd almost swear that *he* himself does not realize even for one moment that there is a problem. So perhaps this album leaves *me*, the listener and critic, a little depressed; but if there is one place from which that depression does *not* come, it is the communicative signal sent out by the artist. Even if the world of rock and roll was crumbling all around Bo Diddley, you would never ever notice it from listening to tracks like 'Bo Diddley Is Loose', which recycle the licks, the words, and the moods of past Bo Diddley songs with such total joy and abandonment, it would seem like self-repetition is simply the most natural and predictable thing in the world.

In light of this, I wouldn't make *too* much fun of that pseudo-Amazon recommendation. There are times in life when an artist repeats himself out of boredom and desperation, and you can sense that boredom in his playing and singing. And then there are times when the artist simply runs out of fresh inspiration, and says, fuck it, why should I keep on inventing stuff? why can't I be allowed to simply make a record that sounds totally like the one before it, just because I love that sound so much? (And I'm not talking about AC/DC, as those guys always strove to come up with new riffs — even on their worst records; I'm talking about *total* self-recyclement where you abandon the very idea of new chord combinations). This is the case of **Bo Diddley Is A Lover**, a record that thrives on sounding exactly like its predecessors while still somehow managing to kick ass against all odds.

