

CILLA BLACK



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1963-2009</i>	<i>Classic soul-pop</i>	<i><u>Love Of The Loved</u> (1963)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *Cilla Black*

Years: *1963-1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

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CILLA

Album released:
Jan. 25, 1965

V A L U E
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Tracks: 1) Goin' Out Of My Head; 2) Every Little Bit Hurts; 3) Baby It's You; 4) Dancing In The Street; 5) Come To Me; 6) Ol' Man River; 7) One Little Voice; 8) I'm Not Alone Anymore; 9) Whatcha Gonna Do 'Bout It; 10) Love Letters; 11) This Empty Place; 12) You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To; 13*) A Shot Of Rhythm And Blues; 14*) You're My World (alt. take); 15*) (Love Is Like A) Heat Wave; 16*) Some Things You Never Get Used To.

REVIEW

Writing about the early years of Cilla Black's career may be one of those moments where a complete outsider's perspective is even more justified than the knowledgeable take of somebody who has been forced to stick with the lady all through the years — in the UK of today, far more people are probably familiar with her as a TV show person than as a Sixties' pop star; moreover, her active and well-publicized stand as a proudly conservative Thatcherite ended up destroying whatever credibility she still had among progressive parts of society, so it is hardly surprising that googling around the Web for various information immediately reveals people asking questions like "is it true that Cilla Black is the single most unpleasant personality in show business?", etc. She's sort of like an Eric Clapton in a skirt these days, even if she's already dead, while Eric is still grudgingly doing his Covid shots.



But hey, just a few months ago I did not know any of that, and for the moment, I'd rather have it stay that way and pretend that we are still living in a stretch of time not earlier than July 1963, when the nervous young redhead passed her first audition at Abbey Road Studios, and not later than January 1965, when, in the wake of two national #1 singles, she put out

her first LP. In between these two chronological bookmarks, there was the year 1964, and in that year, the UK witnessed the birth of exactly two «pop divas» — Dusty Springfield, and Cilla Black. And at the time, it was not easy to predict which of the two would eventually join the rank of the Immortals, and which one would remain grounded; certainly not on the basis of their commercial performance, since Dusty would not have a #1 until 1966 — throughout 1964 at least, Cilla was a bigger presence, though many would probably ascribe this to her Beatles connection rather than anything else.

Personally, I suspect that Cilla's biggest problem was being miscast against type. "She was a working girl, North of England way", with a naturally powerful voice and energetic personality, well-tempered by a tough childhood in the Scottie Road area of Liverpool and musically baptized at the Cavern Club, where she «served time» hanging up visitors' coats — had the stars aligned correctly, she might have become Liverpool's, if not the UK's, leading rocking lady. In fact, I am not lying when I state that of all the tracks on the digital version of **Cilla**, my favorite is her originally unreleased take of 'A Shot Of Rhythm And Blues', recorded for her Parlophone audition at Abbey Road Studios; armed only with her own voice, without any backing vocals or harmonies, she is capable of generating the same amount of exciting rock'n'roll energy as all of the Beatles when they did the song live at their BBC sessions. Maybe the voice can sound a little stiff and restrained by our usual standards of what rock'n'roll is all about, but then again, so could John Lennon's and Paul McCartney's voices in the same time period — maybe they were all a little nervous, or maybe it was just a common Liverpoolian thing. What's important is that it got the job done.

Unfortunately, that path was not followed: «Swinging Cilla White», as she was known in her earliest guest performances at the Cavern, was quickly picked up by Brian Epstein and George Martin, turned into «Cilla Black» (apparently, upon an innocent mistake made by a *Mersey Beat* journalist), and set on the properly lady-like road of pop stardom. Why Epstein, who for rather obvious reasons usually favored boy bands, took such an active interest in her is a bit of a mystery (maybe he sensed some rough boyish charm in her as well?), but Martin never seems to have had a problem with Cilla; in fact, it is largely because of *his* proactive choices that her repertoire quickly became overloaded with easy-listening standards rather than rock'n'roll and R&B tunes.

None of the three songs that built up Cilla's classic reputation were included on **Cilla**, so we shall have to go through with them first, on a separate basis. 'Love Of The Loved' was donated by the Beatles — an early McCartney composition in pop-Elvis style, which can still be heard on the band's Decca audition tapes (for some reason, they did not include it into the **Anthology** set); Martin and Cilla cranked up the energy a lot on this one, he by adding a crunchy brass section and she by

powering up the vocals so much that the song somehow ended up kicked out of soft Latin-pop territory and landed close to Motown R&B. Alas, that does not stop the song from being a trifle, showcasing Paul's technical hook-craft rather than his ability to create emotionally meaningful soundscapes — and it does not exactly help that the lyrics are atrocious, either ("each time I look into your eyes I see that there a heaven lies" — my God, Paul, that *syntax!* why didn't you rhyme 'eyes' with 'paradise' like every decent songwriter before you? It's actually hilarious how Cilla struggles with that last line, transforming the poor little indefinite article into a heavily breathy 'huuuuuh heaven', maybe to mask the overall inane effect of the sentence or something).

Record buyers were not too infatuated with this pseudo-motownization of the Mersey beat, so, for her next try, Martin selected something completely different — David and Bacharach's 'Anyone Who Had A Heart', which had already become a big hit for Dionne Warwick and, for that matter, had already been recorded by Dusty Springfield as well. Later, when Cilla's version swept Warwick's off the UK charts and almost threatened to (though stopped short of) doing the same in the US, Warwick would half-jokingly, half-bitterly complain that Cilla simply copycatted her every inflection — but if she truly believed what she said, this means she probably never had the strength to listen to Cilla's version beyond the opening verse. Of all the classic Motown divas, Dionne Warwick was the most fragile-and-tender-sounding one, and she sang the entire song in that mode — Cilla Black, still very much the tough Liverpudlian working-class bitch, does not have the patience to hush her way through the entire song, and goes into her shrill, screechy, window-shattering register by the time she gets to the "knowing I love you so..." bit. You may not like it — you may, in fact, *hate* it and go all Malcolm McDowell on it — but you gotta admit it sounds... well, kinda *different*.

Arguably it sounds most different at the end of the chorus, where there is a stunning transition between the loud, operatic "be so untrue" and the unexpectedly quiet, innocently fearful, falsetto "what am I to do?" — there's a tiny pinch of emotional magic here which, I'm sure, was single-handedly responsible for the song shooting all the way up to #1. As little as I am a fan of Burt Bacharach (for all his compositional bravery, I tend to dump him in with all the pre-war heroes of Tin Pan Alley in that I consider his songs to be essentially empty vehicles whose success depends entirely on the performer), I have to admit that Cilla stirs up more intrigue with this version than either Dionne *or* Dusty, making it more or less the definitive reading of the song for me.

What happened next, however, was a terrible, terrible crime on the part of George Martin — it was his and nobody else's suggestion that Cilla do an English-language translation of the pop ballad 'Il Mio Mondo' by Umberto Bindi, one of those

typical lush «San Remo» numbers predictably bursting from clichéd sentimentality. If you are a fan of 1960s Eurovision, feel free to disregard my comments, but personally, I can hardly stand the generic «Eurostrings», the operetta vocals, the predictable waltzing buildup, and, worst of all, the realization that I am hearing all this from a lady who, less than a year ago, almost singlehandedly rocked the house down on that Parlophone audition. Of course, the song just *had* to shoot all the way to #1 once again, becoming the biggest hit of Cilla's career and forever cementing her status of a stiff, corny pop ballad singer. It's as if... well, as if the Bangles had started out with 'Going Down To Liverpool' and then immediately hit it big with 'Eternal Flame', if you catch my drift.

It's a good thing that in stepped old friend Paul McCartney, who was almost ready to save the day by giving Cilla a song he wrote specially for her in the mold of 'Anyone Who Had A Heart' rather than 'You're My World' — 'It's For You' also has a Europop tinge to it, recalling the melancholic autumnal mood so typical of contemporary French music rather than the Mersey beat, but then it goes into a complete mess-up of the tempo in the bridge section (Paul was probably trying to prove that Burt Bacharach had nothing on him), and Cilla's ability to alternate between dark melancholy and raging hysterics is quite impressive. (You should [totally see her](#) performing the song on the *Around The Beatles* show, with John and Paul sitting there with big grins on their faces as she breathes the "it's for you" refrain into the backs of their heads — The Cutesy Spirit of '64 epitomized; Paul's bit of "we couldn't possibly do the show without the wonderful and talented... *thingy*" at the beginning was probably uncalled for, though).

And, apparently, now is the time to actually talk about the LP in question — except I don't really want to, because, frankly, the twelve tracks captured on it add little to the mini-set of curious, boring, inspiring, and godawful impressions that Cilla had already produced with her first run of singles. Unfortunately, there are no more Beatles songs on it, unless you count 'Baby It's You', which Cilla does base more closely on the Fab Four's **Please Please Me** version than the Shirelles original; and of the songs that I can compare with the originals, nothing in particular stands out as especially unusual or especially awful. Incidentally, she seems to have developed a passion for Martha & The Vandellas — although I do not know why it was the inferior 'Dancing In The Street' and not the superior 'Heatwave' (found here as a bonus track) that ultimately made the cut: to my ears, the fast tempo and relentless vocal assault of the latter help raise far more excitement than the comparatively stiffer delivery of 'Dancing'.

There are way too many old-fashioned standards here, too, the least convincing probably being 'Ol' Man River', arranged by Martin big-band style with Cilla as some sort of proto-Cher Vegas diva, which, I am afraid, fits neither her personality nor

the nature of the song ("I'm tired of livin', but I'm scared of dyin'" sounds *especially* weird in this context); much better is her take on 'Love Letters', based on the 1962 hit version by Kitty Lester (Elvis would only release his two years later), though here far more credit should go to George Martin's classy arrangement — with that beautiful sequence of piano chords (later «borrowed» by John Lennon for his own 'God', in case you haven't noticed) considerably polished and deepened from Kitty's version. On the other hand, when it comes to deciding between yet another Warwick / Black «War of the Black and White Roses» competition as represented by yet another Bacharach tune, 'This Empty Place', the winner is... (drumroll)... *the Searchers*, who did a better job of personally emphasizing all of the song's strongest moments on their own version. Gee, this is actually fun.

Arguably the only song on the album that might deserve a bit of special attention is 'I'm Not Alone Anymore', since it was written specially for Cilla by a couple of British songwriters (Clive Westlake, who also wrote some material for Dusty Springfield, and Kenny Lynch, one of Britain's earliest black pop singers) — it is musically non-trivial, alternating between standard 4/4 and, uh, a really tricky tempo in between the verse bars, and delighting the listener with moody interplay between the weirdly «treated» piano riff (I have no idea, honestly, what it is producing that sound) and the strings that echo it — oh, and Cilla's performance is no slouch, either, though it is perhaps telling that I mention it last.

On the whole, though, it is clear that, even if the LP was already released in the first month of 1965, arguably *the* big year that finally brought forth the idea of a long-playing record as a place to fully express yourself rather than a container for filler, the music machine around Cilla is still playing by the same rules. It makes very little sense to judge her by these songs at the time, as opposed to the inconsistent, but intriguing run of her earlier singles — so think of **Cilla** as essentially a big supplementary bonus to the 45"s, not vice versa.

