

THE EASYBEATS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
1965–1970	Classic rhythm'n'blues	<i>She's So Fine</i> (1965)

Only Solitaire

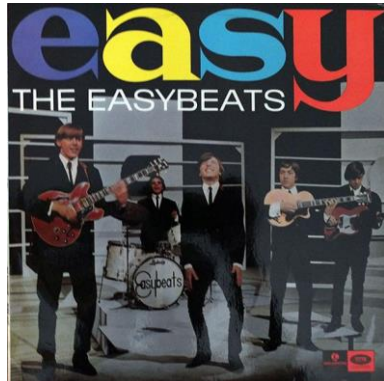
Artist: *The Easybeats*

Years: *1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

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EASY

Album released:
Sep. 23, 1965

V A L U E
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More info:



Tracks: 1) It's So Easy; 2) I'm A Madman; 3) I Wonder; 4) She Said Alright; 5) I'm Gonna Tell Everybody; 6) Hey Girl; 7) She's So Fine; 8) You Got It Off Me; 9) Cry, Cry, Cry; 10) A Letter; 11) Easy Beat; 12) You'll Come Back Again; 13) Girl On My Mind; 14) Ya Can't Do That.

REVIEW

A curious observation I just made is that most of the best-known bands from Australia's «classic rock» period were not fully native to Australia as such, but consisted of the younger stock of the so-called «Ten Pound Poms» generation — UK immigrants to the Land of Oz whose parents had relocated there to seek better perspectives in the post-war era. This applies not only to The Easybeats or The Bee Gees, the two best-remembered Australian bands from the Sixties, but also to some of their predecessors, most notably Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs, and, of course, their successors such as AC/DC, who were basically the godchildren of The Easybeats themselves (and had at least one blood relation).



Interestingly, though, this observation largely seems to work for the *second* generation of Australian rock, the Beatlemania / British Invasion era; the «first wave», born in the 1950s through direct American influence, was mostly homebrewn — incidentally, though, pretty much nobody from that wave, including its biggest stars such as Johnny O'Keefe, ever made any serious splash across the oceans. In the end, it took the kids of those UK (and, occasionally, Holland) immigrants to put Australia on the international musical map — and it is a rather difficult challenge to identify the exact proportions of the

«European» and «Australian» spirits in that mix. The Bee Gees, for instance, never seemed to incorporate too much of the «spirit of Oz», not even in their Australian-era recordings. The Easybeats, on the other hand, did have a special kind of wildness about them — later on, transmitted to AC/DC — that might not have materialized, had they come together in London, Amsterdam, or even Glasgow. Anyway, it's all just a vague nod to the idea that all the best things in life happen at the intersections of cultural traditions, rather than through generations of inbreeding.

I do suppose that any proper talk of the rebirth of Australian rock in the early British Invasion era should probably begin with Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs, the first national band to make a dent in the charts predictably dominated by The Beatles; unfortunately, their first big hit — a cover of the rather ubiquitous '[Poison Ivy](#)' — is such a classic example of how to ruin a great song, marred by stiffness of playing and bad ideas about vocal rearrangements, that it could hardly stimulate anybody into further exploring their career. In any case, they did not make much of an impact on anybody or anything outside of their homeland, nor did they even write any significant amount of their own material, so let someone else tell their story.

The Easybeats, though, were quite a different matter. Consisting of two Englishmen, one Scotsman, and two Dutchmen joined together in an unholy West Germanic alliance on Sydney territory, they were just one out of many local bands with a deep passion for idols of the British Invasion — the influence of the Beatles, the Stones, the Kinks, the Pretty Things, and the Zombies is felt all over their classic output — but unlike most of their local brethren, they knew that the road to self-realization and, with luck, artistic immortality lay through the art of original songwriting. And write they did: mostly courtesy of lead singer Stevie Wright and rhythm guitarist George Young (the elder brother of Malcolm and Angus), but also occasionally joined by lead guitarist Harry Vanda and even the drummer, Snowy Fleet (bass player Dick Diamonde is the only one, I think, who is never listed in the credits).

Apparently, there was a little bit of luck involved in boosting the band's songwriting ego: for their first single, producer Ted Albert wanted them to record a cover of Ben E. King's 'I (Who Have Nothing)', but when local established star Normie Rowe beat them to the punch with his own version, decided to let the boys make their own choice, settling on 'For My Woman', a fairly simple rhythm'n'blues composition in the style of The Pretty Things. It's hardly an unforgettable masterpiece, but two things about it deserve some special attention. First, the simple, but effective minimalism of Young's guitar riff — three notes pummeled over and over again in a pulsating fit of menace and anxiety, inventively selected among miriads of possible combinations and showing that the boys had serious interest in composing their own melodies.

Second, Stevie Wright's lead vocal — everybody points out just how much it was influenced by Phil May, but it's actually a

different kind of voice, without any direct analogy from contemporary British equivalents. Young Stevie does not often resort to screaming or barking out his vocals, like Phil does, nor does he have the kind of stylishly condescending, put-you-down-in-your-place drawl of a cocky and confident Mick Jagger. His "*I, I, I, I want you for my woman...*" rather suggests a man clearly possessed by a most authentic and genuine devil — but it's the devil of friendly drinking and amicable woma-nizing, open to all sorts of sin and immoral behavior as long as it's done in the name of good fun. With Wright at the helm, The Easybeats were loud, rowdy, bawdy, and rebellious, but rarely ever angry, hateful, stuck-up, or politically righteous — which pretty much set them apart from 99% of their UK role models. And the closest equivalent to Stevie Wright's vocal manner that I can actually think of is — yes, you probably guessed — Mr. Bon Scott, to whom Wright [even has a bit of facial resemblance](#), if only you can picture Bon with a Sixties haircut and sporting trendy Sixties mod clothes, instead of the Seventies mane of hair and bare chest.

The other important aspect of the Easybeats' debut single is that, from the very start, they announced that they were outright rejecting the Beatles / Stones dichotomy: they wanted to be a «rock» band *and* a «pop» band at the same time, without letting one side seriously overshadow the other. Counteracting the sleazy-sinister grimace of 'For My Woman' on Side A, Side B is 'Say That You're Mine', a moody and sentimental plea for loving that attempts to answer the question, «what would happen if the Beatles wrote a song in a Zombies' minor key?» Well, we'll actually never know, because Vanda and Young are no Lennon/McCartney, but it's fun to see pretty much the same message — isn't "*I want you for my woman?*" just a slightly more caveman way to implore "*please say that you'll be mine?*" — delivered in a lust-oriented way on one side of the single and in a romance-oriented manner on the other. Kind of brings our attention back to the issue that romance is merely camouflaged lust... or is that the other way around?

The single rose to something like #33 on the Australian charts («something like» because, apparently, Australia still lacked a national hit chart system in early 1965, and this was calculated later), but, to be honest, while I genuinely enjoy both sides of it, the songs *are* a bit simplistic, latching on to a single simple riff or a single vocal hook and milking them for three minutes without any additional ideas (except for the strangely meandering Vanda solo on 'For My Woman', which seems to take an improvisational jazz approach to straightforward blues licks, but the guitar tone is painfully thin). Neither of the two stands up to the level of frenetic energy that the best of the UK rhythm'n'blues bands could stun their audiences with, and both have to be listened to very, *very* closely in order to discern a faint whiff of that special Easybeats spirit. Clearly, something stronger was needed to really jump-start those guys.

That particular something took on the shape of 'She's So Fine', two ecstatic minutes of the finest, funn-est rock'n'roll the year 1965 had ever seen. From the opening friendly-menace-of-a-riff and Stevie's lionine *ROOOOOOOCK!*, the song gets a tight grip and never lets go for a second, rocking out with the swagger of a 'You Really Got Me' but a much more humorous and tongue-in-cheek attitude. Musically, its chief magic is worked by the relentless pumping of Dick Diamonde's bass, immensely boosted by the stop-and-start nature of the verses that reaffirms the instrument's dominance over everything else — but «spiritually», it's all about Stevie continuing the same old song about getting no satisfaction: "*She's so fine... you know I wish she was mine*", he concludes every chorus with this strange mix of admiration, sadness, and drunkenness that, to me, is 100% what the classic Australian rock spirit is all about.

Maybe the coolest things about 'She's So Fine' are the little vocal twists scattered around. For instance, Stevie's devious «encouragement» on Vanda's solo break: "*one... two... three... six! Sorry, 'arry!*" Or the triple repetition of the chorus at the end, when the second time around should have been enough, but apparently the lead singer has just downed another one and goes "*hey, let's go, I want more!*" Or, by contrast, the brusque and laconic "*that's all!*" at the end of the third chorus, cutting out the song in mid-air because, well, why the heck should a great rock'n'roll song run longer than two minutes, anyway? This constant poking around at the fourth wall is important — it shows that the guys never want you to take themselves more seriously than necessary, while at the same time rocking your head off like real pros. But what is *really* intangible is that vocal inflection. There are *very* few covers of 'She's So Fine' floating around, and most of them are no good compared to the original, and it's not difficult to sense why — you just can't properly recapture that once-in-a-lifetime mix of Leeds and Sydney accent to get the proper «Sloshed Delinquent Clown» effect.

In all honesty, while the guitar-bass-drums interplay on the song clearly takes its cue from the likes of 'You Really Got Me' (and, admittedly, is inferior in terms of tone, loudness, and primal energy to its source), the groove they get going on 'She's So Fine' is looser, less committed to a rigid pop structure, and is more suitable for swaggery show-off on all the respective instruments — in that way, the song is a direct predecessor to something like 'The Real Me' from **Quadrophenia**, or, closer in time, to Jimi Hendrix's 'Fire', whose riff, by the way, is almost suspiciously similar to Young's opening on this song. (Also, how much of a coincidence is it that the Jimi Hendrix Experience also had their own song titled 'She's So Fine' on their second album, albeit having nothing to do with this one apart from the title?). In short, we're dealing here with a stone-cold classic, underrated and buried as it is under a pile of better remembered classic rock singles from the same year. If anybody ever tells you that 'Friday On My Mind' is the only great song The Easybeats ever made, pummel them with this little masterpiece until they give up — sure, it is nowhere near as compositionally complex as the band's pop masterpiece,

but the distance between both songs is proportional to the distance between, say, 'You Really Got Me' and 'Waterloo Sunset', and I rarely see the former thumb-downed in light of the latter.

At least back at the time and in their own country, 'She's So Fine' justifiedly turned them into national heroes — launching a wave of «Easyfever» when the local teens sensed the presence of their own homebrewn Beatles. And it wasn't through none of that namby-pamby *please-please-me-I-want-to-hold-your-hand* sissy stuff, either! Maybe those guys showed little of the songwriting genius of Lennon and McCartney, but they *could* write, *and* they went at least two-three notches further in terms of wildness (and hair length, for that matter). It's as if not the Beatles, but the Stones or the early Kinks or Animals had been the number one attraction over in the UK, with the Fab Four lagging behind because, you know, the music was just a little too soft for mainstream youth tastes...

Not that The Easybeats themselves were such perfect Sixties' role models for AC/DC in the Seventies. As I already mentioned, the band clearly had a good ear for all sorts of vibes coming out of the British music scene, and despite the first batch of singles all leaning toward the «hard» side, The Easybeats could be sentimental as well. Their first LP, released in no tremendous hurry about six months after 'She's So Fine' hit the stores, was more or less equally divided between hard rockers and soft ballads — but what is even more important is that *all* the fourteen songs on the album were self-penned, showing that the band understood very well which way the wind blew and had the ambition and capacity of following it, if maybe not quite the genius required to really ride it. Was this actually the first time *ever* that a rock band's debut LP consisted exclusively of original material? I wouldn't bet my life on it, but no earlier examples spring to mind.

'She's So Fine' itself, interestingly enough, was included on **Easy** as the last track on Side A of the vinyl — *exactly* in the same strategic position as 'You Really Got Me' on the Kinks' debut, and both songs are obvious demolish-it-all standouts compared to everything else. But repeated listens bring out the various hidden charms in other songs as well, and, actually, on a track-by-track basis **Easy** feels more enjoyable than **Kinks**: at least Stevie's vocals are always preferable to Dave Davies, and there are no lame pointless covers like 'Bald Headed Woman' or 'Cadillac'. Basically, the problem of **Kinks** was that, already at that early stage, it was clear that some of that stuff matched the soulful aspirations of Ray Davies and some went completely against them; **Easy**, on the other hand, sounds like the band was quite consistently having fun — and being able to write all of their own material certainly had a lot to do with it.

To prove they're open all the way to L-O-V-E no less sincerely than to L-U-S-T, The Easybeats start the album off with the conveniently titled 'It's So Easy' — melodically somewhere in between Beatles and Zombies, though the song never really

gets more interesting than its opening hook. "*It's so eeeeeeeasy to give my heart to you*" is actually a nice verbal twist and a good, catchy motto for the band, the same kind of handy thematic tagline as "*hey hey, we're The Monkees*". After that, though, the lyrics get really clumsy ("*someday you may find that all my love I've lined*"? I thought you're supposed to line coke, not love), and the verses get clogged by corny starry-eyed chords, so all you can do is just wait for the chorus to come back. A nice, but half-assed try, which, unfortunately, is a verdict that applies equally well to most of the other songs here.

On the soft side, Vanda's 'I Wonder' and Young's 'Cry Cry Cry' are pretty jangly folk-pop, the former taking its cue from generic Merseybeat and the latter more in the style of early Ray Davies acoustic ballads — very cute, but slight and, most importantly, without any serious traces of that «local color» which makes 'She's So Fine' irreplaceable. 'I'm Gonna Tell Everybody' is an exercise in more upbeat and danceable romantic pop, but The Dave Clark Five did this kind of stuff louder, tighter, and with better production values. Meanwhile, with 'Hey Girl' they take their inspiration from 'Words Of Love' and try to come up with their own take on the Buddy Holly ballad — again, a decent try, but if you want a second-hand Buddy Holly ballad, you already have Buddy Holly's own backlog: the man rewrote his own successes so frequently that rewrites of rewrites by somebody else are fairly superfluous.

On the hard side of things, though, the situation improves with 'I'm A Madman', a slow blues-rock stomper clearly inspired by The Pretty Things, but with elements of creepy theatricality that Stevie throws in from the back of his own troubled mind. As the song progresses in its portrayal of the protagonist slowly going insane over his inability to find true love, the singer really gets into the groove, impersonating total insanity: "*Here come the doctors, they gonna take me away...*" — again, I might be wrong, but I am not sure that anybody before The Easybeats had actually dared to stage genuine madness within the context of a pop song. Maybe Screamin' Jay Hawkins did, but overall, this is an Alice Cooper-type performance years before Alice Cooper. It's not a great *song* as such, but it might be a bit of a forgotten landmark. My only complaint is that it should have *closed* the album: since about half of the songs here are about not getting any, ending up in the mad-house by way of sexual frustration would be a perfectly natural end of the road for the protagonist.

Strangely, 'She's So Fine' and 'I'm A Madman' are the two most prominent heavy-hitting numbers on the record; the only other songs that rock out loud and proud are the speedy 'Memphis Tennessee' rip-off 'You'll Come Back Again' (there's a really lovely ecstatic moment there when the bass starts playing the classic rising-and-falling boogie-woogie pattern in the middle of the instrumental section while the lead guitar is still wailing away — yes, these guys knew a thing or two about the art of raising tension), and the album-closing 'Ya Can't Do That' — with the Australian-like "*ya*" replacing "*you*" so that, ya

know, nobody confuses this with the Beatles' song — which, when you listen to it long enough, is really just 'Some Other Guy' with a different vocal melody. Rocks, but no 'She's So Fine', that's for sure.

Still, despite the fact that few of these songs are stunners, I strongly disagree with any assessment of The Easybeats as a «singles-only» band, acquaintance with whose output beyond the three or four unquestionably great singles is a waste of time. To use their own words, it's *really* easy to give your heart to an LP like this one. What's not to like about fourteen original (okay, *semi*-original) songs written and recorded by a bunch of fun-lovin', hard-workin' Australians with a good sense of humor, nearly impeccable taste in influences, and complete lack of pretense? I could probably totally get behind the concept of Easyfever, had I been a teen in 1965 Sydney, and feel no shame about it.

Importantly, the record should be acquired in its CD shape from the 1992 Repertoire Records reissue — that way, you also get the 'For My Woman / Say That You're Mine' single, the original B-side of 'She's So Fine' ('The Old Oak Tree' — 'Memphis Tennessee' meets Bo Diddley and random insinuations such as "*mmm, I love the way you play your pretty guitar, Harry*"), «preview-functional» alternate early mixes of 'Friday On My Mind' and 'Lisa', a couple other hard-rockin' outtakes, and a radio broadcast of a live performance of 'She's So Fine' which is even faster, wilder, and more exciting than the original, although the poor sound quality and crowd noises are predictably distracting.

