

GOLDEN EARRING



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1965-2012</i>	<i>Pop rock</i>	<i>Daddy Buy Me A Girl (1965)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *Golden Earring*

Years: *1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

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JUST EAR-RINGS

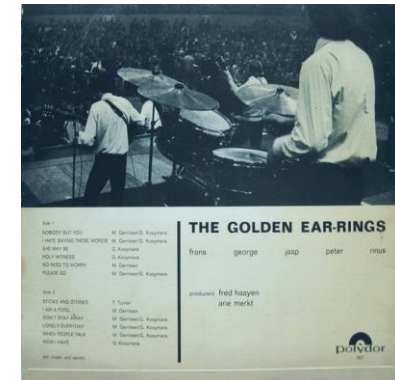
Album released:

V A L U E

November 1965

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More info:



Tracks: 1) Nobody But You; 2) I Hate Saying These Words; 3) She May Be; 4) Holy Witness; 5) No Need To Worry; 6) Please Go; 7) Sticks And Stones; 8) I Am A Fool; 9) Don't Stay Away; 10) Lonely Everyday; 11) When People Talk; 12) Now I Have; 13*) Chunk Of Steel; 14*) That Day; 15*) The Words I Need; 16*) If You Leave Me; 17*) Waiting For You.

REVIEW

There shall be quite a bit of negativity in this review, so let us at least start it up with a couple grapes of praise. First, Golden Earring — at this point in history, still pluralistically called The Golden Ear(-)rings (sometimes with a hyphen and sometimes without it) — were not some sort of Dutch Johnny-come-lately outfit rapidly formed in the wake of the British Invasion; the initial partnership between George Kooymans (vocals, guitar) and Rinus Gerritsen (bass) goes all the way back to 1961, when they started out as «The Tornados», inspired by the original waves of rockabilly, surf-rock, and other seductive sounds rolling over from the other side of the Atlantic. It's not really their fault — or maybe it is, to a degree, but then it's still hardly a crime — that they did not properly get into the recording studio or land themselves a nice contract until the fall of 1965; the Netherlands were hardly the easiest place to secure a deal for a rock'n'roll band *before* music executives all over the world finally got it into their thick heads that rock'n'roll was a lucrative proposition. Additionally, the most popular form of Dutch rock music back in those days was «Indo-rock», an odd mix of American and Austronesian influences imported from Indonesia by the likes



of the Tielman Brothers; the Golden Earrings, on the other hand, preferred to keep their influences less diluted and were not so well aligned with the local trends and fads — that is, precisely until that moment when the local trends and fads were washed away by the overriding influence from across the English Channel in 1964–1965.

The Golden Earrings' second advantage, closely tied in with the first one, was that their several years of original experience taught them that it made more artistic (and, arguably, more commercial) sense to write their own material than rely on covering popular hits by their main influences. One look at the track listing for their debut reveals that all the songs are written by either Kooymans or Gerritsen or the both of them, with but one exception (the cover of Ray Charles' 'Sticks And Stones', which they must have learned from the Zombies' version rather than the original). This gave them a serious reputation boost even in the early days, ensuring a constant presence on the Dutch charts starting from their very first single, even if they would have to wait eight more bleedin' years to break into the international market with 'Radar Love'. Certainly the effort they made was admirable — how many first-rate *British* bands had there been whose members were prolific songwriters from the very start of their recording career?

Unfortunately, there is one problem: it is not enough to write your own songs in order to secure your reputation — they should also have enough of an identity. And 1964–65 were definitely not the best years for aspiring European rock bands to develop their own identity: roughly speaking, everybody wanted to be either the Beatles, or the Rolling Stones, or both of them at the same time with a dessert serving of the Zombies and the Kinks in between. This is precisely the case of early Golden Earring, whose material is almost entirely composed of chords, melodies, and harmonies that any fan of classic British Invasion already knows by heart — dutifully reshuffled in such a way as to avoid direct plagiarism suits, but the downside is that most of the songs become the musical equivalent of an incorrectly assembled IKEA dresser: all the parts are there, but somehow nothing ever opens or closes properly.

A case in point is their debut single, 'Please Go'. Beatles, Stones, and Zombies all donate blood on this plaintive mid-tempo shuffle which diligently goes through nasty-to-soulful key changes, bluesy harmonica breaks, and folksy acoustic flourishes, all the while pinned to a ponderous Ringo-style beat. But none of these elements ever really coalesce into a meaningful hook; somehow, everything is still totally predictable and there aren't any real surprises. Frans Krassenburg, the lead vocalist, is somewhere in between Colin Blunstone and Phil May tonally, effortlessly switching between the vulnerability of the former and the nastiness of the latter but in such an apprentice-like manner that I find it impossible to suspend the proverbial disbelief. Most importantly, though, they simply fail to find one magic chord, one mesmerizing modulation that

would make the song worth your while. It never gets more memorable than on the opening "PLEASE!... GO!...", and in a sea of local competition on the pop market, that's not much of a selling point.

The band did make a conscious effort to showcase their versatility from the get-go, because the B-side 'Chunk Of Steel' (not included on the original **Just Ear-Rings** LP for some reason) contrasts with the A-side by being a tougher — though still reasonably sentimental rather than just brawny — blues-rocker, riding a tough metallic rhythm pattern from Gerritsen and rhythm guitarist Peter de Ronde which has a suitably «industrial» feel to it (suitably aligned with the song title, I mean), unquestionably heavy for 1965 and more similar to wild American garage bands like The Sonics than any representatives of British Invasion royalty. Again, though, this chuggy drive and heaviness are largely wasted on a song that goes nowhere in particular after it has disclosed its main secret in its first five seconds.

Still, it cannot be denied that the band members at least knew how to play their instruments and had an earnest vibe all around, so I certainly cannot judge the Dutch public harshly for putting the single into their own Top 10 — it ain't great music, but it deserves recognition. The mild success of the single also allowed Polydor to follow it up with an entire LP of largely original material, released just a couple months later — and everything good and bad that I just said about the single applies in equal part to the LP, which is no big surprise considering that they were all recorded during the same sessions.

Even after three or four diligent listens, not a single song on **Just Ear-Rings** remains in my head (with the exception of 'Sticks And Stones', naturally, that had always been there from the start anyway). The problem is the same — and it is *not* the over-reliance on over-the-Channel influences, *not* even the lack of individual identity, it is what I perceive as an inability to understand what it is that makes this or that particular song click and come to life. Take the opening number, 'Nobody But You'. It opens with high promise, as the drummer pulls off a bit of a Keith Moon, and the lead harmonies promise old-school Merseybeat ecstasy. But then the bridge section ("*when I look at you...*") changes key à la something like the Beatles' 'Thank You Girl', without, however, managing to set up a different emotional atmosphere, and even wasting a falsetto twist at the end (something that the *real* Beatles would never allow themselves — their higher range was always supposed to be the trigger for teenage orgasmic bliss). Formally satisfactory, but ultimately hollow and lifeless.

Sometimes the seams are *very* visible, as they are on the second song, 'I Hate Saying These Words', where I can almost reconstruct the process of songwriting in my own mind — after a long, painful night listening and re-listening to those freshly bought copies of **Beatles For Sale** and **Help!**, with echoes of 'I Don't Want To Spoil The Party' and 'You Like Me Too Much' still ringing in the boys' ears. Sometimes the exact sources are more difficult to pinpoint, as with the third song,

'She May Be', which just keeps hammering in its one-chord riff for two minutes. Inspired by the Kinks, perhaps — or the Byrds? — it's actually a somewhat original, rough-rollin' «garage-folk» thing that, to me, sounds incredibly stiff and boring. Maybe there's something off-putting about the limp and ugly vocal harmonies, but mainly it's because they have not found any exciting directions in which to point them.

It's all the more sorrowful considering that the overall *sound* of the Earrings is quite tasteful. There are no attempts here of any kind to pander to the preferences of «bourgeois» audiences — ringing guitars, pounding rhythm sections, plenty of raw rock'n'roll drive on the harder numbers and tons of folk-rock earnestness on the softer ones. No fluffy ballads, sentimental strings, or Vegasy attitudes; these Dutch boys knew where exactly the musical truth could be found and they went straight for the right sources. Alas, they suffered the same curse that so many of their spiritual indie followers have continued to suffer in the 21st century: they wanted so much, so desperately to catch that British Invasion spirit by the tail that they forgot the unwritten golden rule — the spirit only lands on those who carve their *own* path. It's no good sitting down and saying, "*I'm not moving from this spot until I have written a song as good as 'I Don't Want To Spoil The Party'!*", because it's a creative dead end that will either have you transforming into Simeon Stylites or into Baron Munchausen.

In the end, I can certainly respect a record like this — after all, there is no denying that The Golden Ear-Rings were one of the very first continental bands to have successfully incorporated the sonic trademarks of the Beatles, the Stones, the Animals, the Kinks, the Pretty Things, the Zombies, *and* the Byrds (yes, all at the same time!) into one 12-song package. You could write a lengthy Ph.D. thesis dissecting the record's influences, or write a thrilling 200-page long musicological treatise (*How I Mastered The Mid-Sixties' Spirit Just By Listening To One Lousy Album*). Unfortunately, the one reason why I won't do either of these things is that I utterly lack the desire to listen to the album for the fifth time. And for the record, yes, (The) Golden Ear(-)ring(s) *would* get better; but this particular brand of the First LP Curse is a strong one, rooted as deeply as one's DNA, and you can never really get rid of it completely. Medically treatable, yes, but incurable.

