

# THE GRAHAM BOND ORGANIZATION



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1964-1965</i>	<i>Classic UK R&amp;B</i>	<i><u>Early In The Morning</u> (1965)</i>

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*Only Solitaire*

Artist: *Graham Bond*

Years: *1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

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## THE SOUND OF '65

Album released:

April 2, 1965

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**Tracks:** 1) Hoochie Coochie; 2) **Baby Make Love To Me**; 3) Neighbour, Neighbour; 4) **Early In The Morning**; 5) Spanish Blues; 6) Oh Baby; 7) Little Girl; 8) I Want You; 9) Wade In The Water; 10) Got My Mojo Working; 11) Train Time; 12) Baby Be Good To Me; 13) Half A Man; 14) Tammy.

### REVIEW

Life has taught me not to throw around words like «overrated» and «underrated» without carefully weighing them over to avoid generic abuse (such as «overrated» = «Robert Christgau gave this record an A+, and I think it only deserves a B!», «underrated» = «I turned on my classic rock radio station and they haven't played this song in 24 hours!», etc.). But there are times when you really can't help shouting it out at the top of your lungs out of an intense desire to correct a historical injustice. So everybody quiet down while I do just that, albeit still as academically as possible: THE GRAHAM BOND ORGANIZATION IS THE MOST UNIVERSALLY UNDERRATED ROCK GROUP OF THE YEAR 1965. And here's objective proof: as of this moment, **The Sound Of '65** is rated as #222 for 1965 on RateYourMusic, well below France Gall's **France Gall**, Buffy Sainte-Marie's **Many A Mile**, and Frank Sinatra's **September Of My Years**, to name just a few albums whose innovation, in comparison, would rank close to zero and whose enjoyability, also in comparison, would only appeal to fans of predictable formula (even if there is nothing officially wrong with that).



Even worse, here are some of the judgements made by those few RYM users who actually listened (or, at least, pretended to listen) to the album in question: "**The Sound Of '65** sounds very basic to my modern ears", "*the rendering of the period rock and rolls (sic!) is excellent*", "*the typical mid sixties jazz/blues rock combination*", "*rooted in the same kind of R&B sound that inspired bands like the Zombies*". Reading these brief descriptions almost makes me wonder if I have been listening to the same album — that is, of course, before I realize that most people (myself included, actually) gradually work their way *backwards* to the Graham Bond Organization. For somebody weened on Cream and Colosseum, on the fusion style of John McLaughlin and on the blues-rock of early Jeff Beck and Led Zeppelin, **The Sound Of '65** may indeed seem «backward» and «generic». But all it takes is putting yourself in the proper historical context — start working *forward* toward this kind of sound, comparing it with the general state of the British musical market in 1964 — and pretty soon you will have no choice but to acknowledge the *gigantic* leap forward that Graham Bond and his friends had made with the kind of music contained therein. Sure enough, maybe Cream and Colosseum would take these ideas and push them forward in even more creative and passionate ways (and maybe they wouldn't, depending on what you count as genuine creativity). But it is clear as day that the seeds of both these bands, and many, many other blues-rock, jazz-rock, and experimental rock combos of the Sixties are to be found in the depths of that weird, many-headed, self-destructive beast they called The Graham Bond Organization.

Let us begin with the simple fact that Graham Bond himself, for better or worse, was the very first of that long line of Rock and Roll's Crazy Diamonds — before Syd Barrett, before Skip Spence, even before Captain Beefheart, here was the first officially certified madman of his generation who, for about a decade, succeeded in channeling his inner demons into his music before the inner demons gained the upper hand and succeeded in channeling him under the wheels of a Piccadilly line train. Gruff, bearded, unkempt, overweight — the perfect antithesis to the image of a young rock'n'roll hero — he was a constant presence on the London jazz and blues scene since 1960, playing saxophone and, later, organ in various combos (including Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated), before his unique demeanour, imposing stage presence, and proficiency on his instruments allowed him to build up his own personal combo, and what a combo it was: Ginger Baker on drums, Jack Bruce on bass, and an equally young John McLaughlin on guitar. Alas, not many recordings survive from that unique lineup, which lasted less than a year altogether, and the ones that do are rather underwhelming (e.g., a [live recording](#) of 'I'm Gonna Move To The Outskirts Of Town' with the band still working out their sound; much more interesting, with a lively McLaughlin solo part, is this '[Untitled Abbey Road Blues](#)' from May '63).

By 1964, McLaughlin had left the band, and was replaced by Dick Heckstall-Smith, another alumnus of Alexis Korner, on

saxophone — which left the quartet without a guitar player as such, and prompted its renaming from the Graham Bond Quartet to the punny-titled Graham Bond Organization. Yet despite Bond's organ officially becoming the dominant voice in the band's collective sound, the Organization was nowhere near a dictatorship. First, Bond himself was way too chaotic, messy, and substance-dependent to effectively install any «administration» (much like Syd Barrett, indeed), and second, with characters such as Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce in your band, it would be hard to imagine how exactly they could be «administrated». The group quickly turned into the Graham Bond Disorganization, each of whose various members did exactly what he wanted to do and pulled as much weight as he wanted to pull — which would quite inevitably destroy the group in the blink of an eye, but during that one year in which the eye was blinking, the anarchy resulted in some of the most unique, progressive, futuristic, hard-to-classify music produced in that year.

One of the band's major advantages was that, unlike the majority of their British contemporaries, *all* of its members — not one, not two, but *all* of them — came from a strictly jazz background, which meant (a) highly demanding standards of professionalism and (b) propensity for improvisation, creativity, and unpredictability. In their McLaughlin days, they did play a lot of jazz in their live sets; with his departure, however, the accent shifted toward more commercial forms of music (blues, pop, R&B) over which there still remained hanging a thick cloud of jazz aesthetics and jazz discipline. (If somebody wants to go ahead and call **The Sound Of '65** the first ever jazz-rock album, I have no problem with that, except it doesn't really sound anything like Blood, Sweat & Tears). This combination pretty much ensured that they had no equals on the UK scene at the time — with the possible exception of Manfred Mann, who could be comparable in terms of discipline but were far more commercialized, shiny, and poppy than the terrifying four-headed beast of the GBO.

The feeling of a new, dangerous, hardly categorizable force emerges already with the release of the band's first single, for the A-side of which they chose a song everybody was covering at the time — Tommy Tucker's ['Long Tall Shorty'](#), which you probably might know from the rather subpar Kinks version (with a highly annoying whining vocal from Dave Davies). There is no really much one can do with this kind of thoroughly generic rhythm'n'blues material, but the GBO turn in what is probably the single most energetic and inventive arrangement of the song ever recorded. Bruce and Baker's rhythm section is subdued and simple, but tight and punchy; the main attraction, however, are the three-part harmonies between organ, sax, *and* harmonica which launch the song into the air as if it were a veritable «symphony of the birds». A simple trick, one might say, but who else did this in 1964? Moreover, throw in some build-up, as the call-and-response coos and quacks of the three instruments gradually expand into more complex phrasing, until, at times, the organ and the harmonica begin sounding like they want to peck each other's eyes out (thus symbolically marking the normal state of relationships inside

the GBO at all times of its existence). And on top of all that comes Bond's vocal performance — deep, scruffy, earthy, and *very* reeking of significant amounts of whiskey poured down that throat at one time or another. Long John Baldry may have had a similar tone, but in comparison, he was... "very clean", as Paul McCartney might have said.

This ability to put a unique spin on the classics is easily carried over and perfected on the band's first proper LP. So it begins with yet another recording of 'Hoochie Coochie Man', a song with the same status for young British rhythm'n'blues practitioners as 'Smoke On The Water' now carries for every beginning guitar player, but do not dare to call this a *generic* 'Hoochie Coochie Man' to my face without a trip to the ear doctor, at least not until you listen attentively to whatever the hell Ginger Baker is beating out on his tom-toms, or to the glorious Bond-Bruce vocal cacophony on the chorus, or to Dick Heckstall-Smith's glorious sax bleating on the solo, or, heck, at least to the way Bond hollers out "...gonna make all you chicks *come*... yeah, into my hand!" in the second verse, probably putting a heavy blush on old McKinley Morganfield's face in the process with what might have been the first attested specific usage of said verb in the history of pop music. (At least, I certainly cannot remember any earlier examples).

Likewise, you probably could not pass the CAKE (Certified Alexis Korner Examination) without playing 'Got My Mojo Working', but could you really resist the Bruce-Baker rhythm section cracking it up on the song while Bond's organ and Dick's saxophone are making a crazyass speedy mess in the foreground? I certainly couldn't. However, lest you think that the GBO only made good on Muddy Waters — whose ecstatic vocal wildness on record was well up Bond's own alley, with an added streak of emotional insanity — there is also a cover of the much less known recent mini-hit 'Neighbor Neighbor' from Jimmy Hughes, which Bond sings with total delirious abandon and 100% soul, even if it means having to get off key every now and then (the "neighbor neighbor, STAY OUT OF MY LIIIIIFE!..." bit is really hard on the ears, but it is possibly the single most insane yell put on a British record in 1965). The overall sound — bass, drums, organ, sax — is heavy as lead, and the combination of musical discipline and musical insanity is really one-of-a-kind.

For all of that sound, one thing Graham Bond could never properly pull off was songwriting. He did want some credits to his name, and five out of fourteen titles on the album formally belong to him. But of these, 'Oh Baby' is really just a short tribal organ riff, while most of the song is taken over by a wild drum solo from Ginger — as you can easily guess, a short precursor to Cream's classic 'Toad', and you can *very* easily recognize the style of 'Toad' in the young drummer's ferocious thrashing of his kit. 'Little Girl' is just two-minutes of mid-tempo blues vamping; I could listen to the band jamming it up a lot longer than that, but this is certainly not a «song» as such. 'I Want You' is a great groove as well, but most of its power

comes from the twin bass-sax weave of Bruce and Heckstall-Smith and from another of Ginger's mammoth workouts, so they should have all received credit. Nor do I have any idea of how Bond «wrote» 'Spanish Blues', which is essentially a cool (though slightly naggy) duet between Bond and Heckstall-Smith on alto and tenor saxes, respectively, as Bruce and Baker supply them with a lively Latin groove (something they could never try at home, uh, I mean, in Cream, considering Eric Clapton's inexperience with that kind of style).

To rectify the situation, witness another first: the emergence of Jack Bruce (and his wife, Janet Godfrey) as a competent songwriter. Two of the tracks already give a good preview of his quirky, moody, strange-sounding songwriting style in the future. 'Baby Make Love To Me' is one of the weirdest creations of 1965, formally a soul ballad but played and sung as low as possible, so that the vocals, saxes, and bass all seem to be delivering a funereal dirge — if anything, I'd probably subtitle it 'Count Dracula's Love Song': the tentative "d'you think that we could, maybe... make love, make love, make love?" lines concluding each verse smell of cemetery dust and cobwebs rather than actual sex. The (not coincidentally?) similarly titled 'Baby Be Good To Me' at least gallops along at a much quicker tempo, but still sounds creepy as heck; on both songs, Bruce takes lead vocals, and they are already every bit as depressed, paranoid, and frightening as they would be throughout all of his future career. Certainly the roots of his early Cream classics such as 'Sleepy Time Time' and 'Sweet Wine' lie here.

Still, it's nothing next to the creeping madness that is the band's two-minute-long reworking of the old road work song 'Early In The Morning'. In the GBO's live performances, it was often used as a launching pad for another of Ginger's drum solos, but here, it is just two minutes of a dark, dreary, nagging bass-'n'-sax groove, atop of which Bond, Bruce, and maybe the other guys as well sing in such tired, pissed-off, dejected voices as if they'd really been breaking rocks for an entire afternoon; when Bruce comes in with his dissonant "it was a dirty lie!" across the group harmonies of the others, it feels like the most jarring, sharp-edged moment of the entire year. The song would eventually take on a life of its own (Ginger in particular would revive it in a far more psychedelic and elaborate arrangement for his Air Force five years later), but this here is the bare minimum to remind us of how well that prison work song stylistics actually set with a band as grim and crazy as the Graham Band Organization.

Bruce is also given credit for the band's rearrangement of the spiritual 'Wade In The Water', which Bond embellishes with Bach-style organ; this is a good showcase for Graham's near-virtuosity on his instrument, as he plays a couple of solos every bit as good as Deep Purple's Jon Lord at his finest (actually, Lord always acknowledged Bond as a major influence); and, finally, **The Sound Of '65** is where you meet the original, fast and concise, version of Jack's 'Traintime', which most

people probably only know in its extended harmonica-porn version on **Wheels On Fire**. Here, Jack's harp playing is brief, sharp, precise, and perfectly in sync with Ginger's choo-choo train percussion — an economic two and a half minute delight rather than the over-the-top excess of Cream's live shows.

But if there is one truly genial final touch to the album, it is its final track. After thirteen numbers of off-the-wall blues, jazz, and R&B craziness, probably the very last thing you would expect is for them to close the proceedings with a sentimental, corny showtune: and, of course, this is exactly what they do, choosing 'Tammy' from the 1957 movie with Debbie Reynolds, so far largely a showcase for the likes of Bing Crosby and Andy Williams rather than Muddy Waters. And guess what — it sounds *great* with the dark, deep, swampy sound they deliver, with pianos, organs, deep bass, and faraway brass laying the ground down for Bond's Brother Bear vocalization. It feels not unlike Captain Beefheart's future experiments with corny mainstream pop, salvaged mostly through the oddball freshness of his jungle voice — here, too, Bond gives the song a curious and thoroughly heartfelt soul vibe, ripping it out from its usual safe and syrupy environments by answering the question "how would a song like 'Tammy' sound if it were sung by a drunk, sick, crazy hobo with a heart of gold?" And again, things like this would be done many times later, from Beefheart to the Pogues, but nobody other than the utterly crazy Graham Bond Organization could dream of pulling it off in early 1965.

That a record like this did not even make a faint dent in the charts back in 1965, being that far ahead of its time, is no big surprise. A big thank you to Columbia, of course, who had the bravery to sign the band, and to Robert Stigwood who managed it and (at least nominally) produced the album — ironically, the GBO were the first more or less famous act to be managed and produced by Stigwood, despite being a total antipode to his *most* famous clients (the Bee Gees). But for those four guys — who essentially looked like a cross between a bunch of street thugs and existentialist philosophy students — to leave behind the world of post-bop elitism and try to implode the pop market from within instead was a financially suicidal move; and as happy as I am that they *did* make it, it is also clear as day that they made it at least a few years too early. Still, get this and the following album (both of which can be neatly owned on one CD due to their brevity) at all cost if you want to experience «the sound of '65» in all of its arrogantly deranged sophistication.

