

# THE ISLEY BROTHERS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1957-2022</i>	<i>Classic R&amp;B</i>	<i><a href="#">Respectable</a> (1959)</i>

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*Only Solitaire*

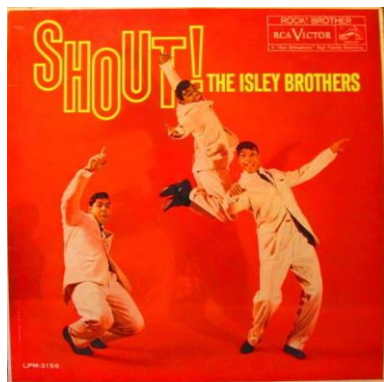
Artist: *The Isley Brothers*

Years: *1957-1959*

George Starostin's Reviews

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- [Shout!](#) (1959)



## SHOUT!

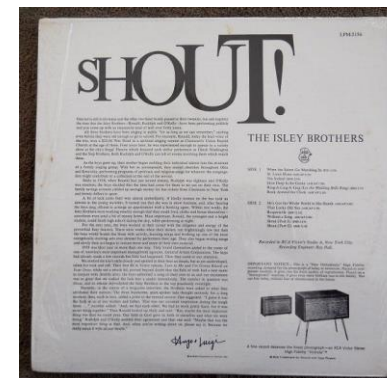
Album released:

V A L U E

October 1959

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More info:



**Tracks:** 1) When The Saints Go Marching In; 2) St. Louis Blues; 3) Yes Indeed; 4) How Deep Is The Ocean; 5) Ring-A-Ling-A-Ling; 6) Rock Around The Clock; 7) He's Got The Whole World In His Hands; 8) That Lucky Old Sun; 9) **Respectable**; 10) Without A Song; 11) **Shout (Part I)**; 12) **Shout (Part II)**.

### REVIEW

Unfortunately, none of the editions of **Shout!** include any of the Isley Brothers' earliest recordings, made in 1957-58, as bonus tracks — probably because they were published by a variety of short-lived record labels, such as «Teenage Record Co.» and «Mark-X», all of them allegedly set up by the musical entrepreneur George Goldner, who more or less went down in history as the single greatest discoverer of teenage African-American vocal talent in the 1950s (including both Frankie Lymon *and* Little Anthony). Seeing as how Ronnie Isley, the youngest of the three main Isley Brothers, was only 16 in 1957, this made the talented Cincinnati trio into an obvious target for Goldner's strategies, but with his habit of setting up his own record labels that came and went in a matter of months, who even really knows today about the copyright situation with this material?



At least it is digitally possible to locate all these dusty, often *very* poorly recorded early takes surfing across the waves of the Internet, and I'd heartily recommend going for it — not just for historical purposes, but for an actually amusing and instructive little journey of «edutainment». Truly, the first six singles these guys put out before finally making it big with 'Shout!' are quite a hilarious trip on the road to self-discovery; for about two years, the Isleys were ready to try out just about *anything* in order to prove their right to artistic existence. It is perhaps worth a little admiration that most of those

early songs are credited or at least co-credited to the Isleys themselves — they were quite reluctant to directly cover other people's material (at least until they signed up with their first big label, RCA, where they were probably forced to resort to straightahead covers by guys in suits) — but it is also quite amusing how just about every one of these songs tries to emulate some of the already established musical authorities.

Thus, 'The Cow Jumped Over The Moon', as the title already suggests, is a silly novelty number that copies the fast dance style of the Drifters (Ronald's lead vocals are almost indistinguishable from Clyde McPhatter's at this point), while the B-side, 'Angels Cried', is a sweet and sappy doo-wop ballad that emulates... well, just about any sweet and sappy doo-wop band from the decade's early days (sorry, I am not a great connoisseur of the genre). The novelty kick continues with 'Rockin' McDonald' (indeed!!), where the Drifters' vibe is toughened up and remade into more of a Little Richard one, while the B-side, 'Don't Be Jealous', rides atop such a painfully generic use of the doo-wop progression that its very presence in the Isleys' catalog feels like an embarrassing anachronism. Then 'Everybody's Gonna Rock And Roll' is their attempt to do comic rock'n'roll in the vein of Larry Williams (ripping off the sax riff of 'Bony Moronie' and everything), while the B-side, 'I Wanna Know', is their attempt to do hystrionic soulful R&B in the vein of James Brown, with Ronnie doing something that could only be construed as a parody on the vocal gimmicks of the Hardest Working Man In Show-Biz.

With 'The Drag', they went back to Little Richard territory (that bass line is 'Lucille' personified), mixing it up with a little early twist attitude; the B-side 'My Love' also returns them to generic doo-wop territory. 'This Is The End', their only single on the «Cindy» label, is, I think, their first song credited to outside songwriters, a rhythmic pop ballad that's a little more Elvis than old-fashioned doo-wop but still does nothing for the Isley Brothers as an independent unit. Finally, their first single for RCA Victor, their first label that generously picked them in mid-1959 — for what reason, I have no idea — was 'I'm Gonna Knock On Your Door', a song written by Aaron Schroeder, the author of Elvis' 'I Got Stung' and 'Big Hunk O'Love', and its lively pop-rock style does indeed feature some of the exact same chord changes as we hear on 'I Got Stung'; the B-side, 'Turn To Me', is predictably another Elvis-style ballad.

There is absolutely nothing about this musical journey that would be worth «treasuring» — it is merely the constantly evolving sound of a young group trying to find its own face in a pool of reflections of other people's faces. But *something*, that little old weird something deep inside your mind, keeps telling you that one of these days, they might actually get around to finding it. The main clue here is *exuberance*. They might not be doing anything even remotely original, but, like the young Beatles in their early Cavern or Hamburg days, they are getting into it with such dedicated verve that you kinda

know: these are just the rehearsals, early scholarly exercises, and sooner or later these guys' passion might want to pay off, if only they stop listening to other people's records so much and begin acting upon their own instincts. After all, young Ronnie Isley's voice *is* strong, beautiful, and flexible, and his elder brothers *are* playing loyal and dedicated soldiers to their commander's lead, so if only they could somehow capitalize on all that energy, bypassing the restrictive musical clichés that prevent the listener from getting fully carried away...

...and this is precisely what happened during the emergence of 'Shout!' — which, famously, began life as a mere jamming coda to the trio's live performances of Jackie Wilson's 'Lonely Teardrops'. Now I cannot be entirely sure that this was the very first instance in the history of R&B as a genre when such an obviously «non-song» recording would be put out as a single and become a big hit — but according to the degree of depth with which I have managed to survey the genre, it seems like a damn good bet. A direct predecessor (and inspiration?) may have been Ray Charles' 'What'd I Say, Part 2', released in June 1959 ('Shout!' was recorded exactly one month later) — yet even there, the orgasmic 'Part 2' was merely a playful extension to 'Part 1', which was a proper verse-chorus tune in its own right.

'Shout!', on the other hand, is a former coda which, having been cut off from its source, took on an autonomous life on its own and became what it is: a maniacal, concentrated, bursting ball of rhythmic energy which states, bluntly and arrogantly, that rock'n'roll wildness does not have to be some sort of «bonus add-on» to some compositional exercise. Chord changes? Bridges? Verses? Choruses? Who needs all that complex crap detracting you from the sole purpose for which you are in this dance hall or night club — kicking out the jams? It's all just boring foreplay, let's get straight ahead to the fucking. 'Shout!' is *definitely* an experience for those who don't want to waste their time on trivialities; groove in its purest form, carried over from the African-American gospel church tradition, but secularized for general consumption *à la* Ray Charles — and made even more exciting than any actual Ray Charles experience because this is precisely what these guys were made for: winding up the audiences with precisely the right vocal mix to create an ecstatic flur-of-frenzy.

If there is a single flaw about the five minutes of 'Shout!', evenly spread across the two sides of the record, it is that this is a song which really only makes sense when it's live — the perfect catalyst to get any kind of audience on its feet, if not right into the air, which, of course, explains why it so quickly made its way into the setlist of just about every British rhythm-and-blues band in existence (very few actually bothered to put it on a studio record, though — the Animals' version was quite outstanding, but, funny enough, they actually restored its «coda» status in a medley with Ray Charles' 'Talkin' 'Bout You'). They sure did their best to model a quasi-live sound in the studio, but it is still nothing compared to watching old, grainy,

muddy-sounding clips from Shindig ([such as these](#)) that manage to give a *faint* idea of how exciting all of this was when the Brothers were still in their youthful prime (not that they didn't sound great ever afterwards, but 'Shout!' is such a classic representative of the young-and-innocent days of rock and roll that watching it performed around 1969, let alone any later date, already spoils the purity of the excitement with its nostalgic-anachronistic vibe).

Still, even the slightly more sterile and reserved studio version of the rave all but gave popular music a whole new purpose, and finally put the Isley Brothers on the map with their own sound and their own angle, instead of having to set Mother Goose lyrics to Little Richard's melodies. Now at last they knew what to do, and even turning 'Shout!' into a formula worked for a while — not commercially, because 'Respectable', their follow-up to 'Shout!', failed to chart, but aesthetically, because 'Respectable' is not *totally* a repetition of 'Shout!', but rather it tries to harness the energy of 'Shout!' by shaping it into a bit more of an actual song with an actual verse and chorus, while leaving everything else intact — the breakneck tempo, the wildly strummed rhythm guitars, the hysterical lead vocal, the loyally disciplined backing vocals, the repetitive-yet-building-up craziness of the atmosphere. (It's interesting that the Yardbirds would later choose 'Respectable' over 'Shout!' for their **Five Live Yardbirds** setlist — perhaps because its more song-like shape allowed to put a little less pressure on backing vocals, never a strong side of the band in any of its many guises).

The same brand new Isley Brothers formula was applied to quite a bit of the material that they selected for their first (and last) LP on RCA — unable to come up with enough original material, they fell back on covers which, however, they felt free to «shout-ify» as much as possible. Some of the choices are quite unpredictable indeed: it is one thing to make a rave out of 'When The Saints Go Marching In', a song so flexible it can be performed in any genre (side note: Paul McCartney's final vocal stretch on 'All Together Now' is lifted directly from the final vocal stretch on this cover — probably subconsciously, though) — but it is an entirely different one to take Irving Berlin's 'How Deep Is The Ocean?' and transform it into one of 'Shout!'s many little brothers just as well. Or do the same to 'That Lucky Old Sun', which they start off deceptively as a near-accappella ballad, then, thirty seconds later, push into the same alley with 'Shout!' again.

I cannot say that I am a big fan of this approach — but I can sort of understand it, at least; when you have something that is uniquely yours, it can be fun putting this Midas touch on just about anything coming your way. Still, I am more interested in their less predictable, riskier experiments, such as reinventing 'St. Louis Blues' as a weird cross-genre experiment, with a little blues, a little doo-wop, a little pop, and even a little Latin whiff combining to turn the old urban blues classic into something that's literally pulsating with new musical life. Other than 'Shout!' and 'Respectable', this is probably the only

remaining highlight on the LP, and definitely a bit of a «dark horse» that seriously hints at how creative and unpredictable the Brothers would occasionally get in their later career. The rest of the songs are generally fun to hear, but expendable in the long run — a particular nadir being the totally unnecessary cover of ‘Rock Around The Clock’, a song with which they were unable to do anything of interest and whose rhythmic contour just does not feel particularly right for the brothers’ musical spirit. At least when they mangled Little Richard, they sounded serious; trying to put an R&B spin on Bill Haley without completely remaking the song sounds like a waste of time.

In a way, the success of ‘Shout!’ actually made it difficult for the Isleys to advance for a while — they’d have to wait more than two years for their next hit, as if the public simply did not want to acknowledge *anything* coming from these guys that wouldn’t constitute another musical mini-revolution; or, perhaps, people instinctively felt that anybody with the balls to put out ‘Shout!’ as a single was automatically on the road to becoming a one-hit wonder, because if your best known number is ‘Shout!’, what else can you *really* do? Fortunately for us, the Isley Brothers had no other profession than singing, though, so it was only a matter of time before they would once again emerge victorious on the scene...

