

THE KINKS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1964-1994</i>	<i>Classic pop-rock</i>	<i>Autumn Almanac (1967)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Kinks*

Years: *1964-1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

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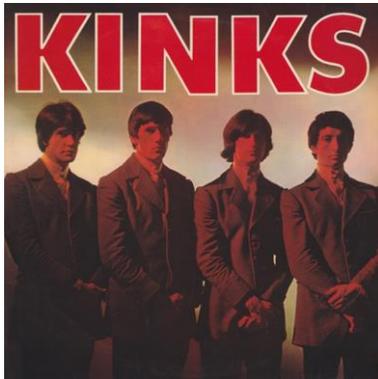
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Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Kinks*

Album: *Kinks (1964)*

George Starostin's Reviews



KINKS

Album released:

Oct. 2, 1964

V A L U E
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More info:



Tracks: 1) Beautiful Delilah; 2) So Mystifying; 3) Just Can't Go To Sleep; 4) Long Tall Shorty; 5) I Took My Baby Home; 6) I'm A Lover Not A Fighter; 7) **You Really Got Me**; 8) Cadillac; 9) Bald Headed Woman; 10) Revenge; 11) Too Much Monkey Business; 12) I've Been Driving On Bald Mountain; 13) Stop Your Sobbing; 14) Got Love If You Want It; 15*) Long Tall Sally; 16*) You Still Want Me; 17*) You Do Something To Me; 18*) It's Alright; 19*) All Day And All Of The Night; 20*) I Gotta Move; 21*) Louie, Louie; 22*) I Gotta Go Now; 23*) Things Are Getting Better; 24*) I've Got That Feeling; 25*) Too Much Monkey Business; 26*) I Don't Need You Any More.

REVIEW

History has been kinder to the back catalog of the Kinks than to quite a few of their contemporaries; all of their original LPs on Pye Records (and even all of their later RCA and Arista records) have been re-released in CD format as expanded versions, including all the accompanying singles (as well as some hitherto unreleased demos and outtakes) as bonus tracks and saving us from the problem of having to hunt down scattered individual gems, and/or to rely on the parallel American catalog in order to get a more comprehensive, but also more confusing, picture of the band's output — see the Rolling Stones for a good example. In the case of the Kinks, just as in the case of the Hollies or, in fact, in the case of pretty much every British Invasion band with the possible exception of the Beatles, this is particularly important since, for the first couple years of their existence, true gold from this band only came in the form of 45 rpms.



Well, maybe not in the form of their *first* 45 rpm, an oddly slow cover of 'Long Tall Sally' with an unexplainably swampy harmonica solo. The slowing down means that it does not even begin to compare to the maniacal Little Richard original or, for that matter, to the Beatles' version in terms of overall craziness. Its choice for the band's first single was probably dictated by brother Dave Davies, the quintessential «rocker» in the group, and his none-too-pretty nasal vocals and overdubbed waves of screaming (arguably the only exciting thing about the recording) are all over the place here, but they failed to convince UK audiences at the time.

With brother Dave failing at his task, brother Ray steps into the game with his original composition 'You Still Want Me' — a pretty little bit of power pop whose opening ringing power chords strongly predict the band's classic early sound, as well as that of the Who and other upcoming pop-rock bands with a whiff of garage aesthetics. Unfortunately, the song in general sounds way too much like... no, *not* like the Beatles, as you might have guessed (Ray always had too much condescension towards the Fab Four), but rather to contemporary Dave Clark Five (Mick Avory's thumping drumming here pretty much apes the Dave Clark jackhammer approach) without being able to match or better the DC5's glossy production values, and, once again, the record-buying public was bored.

The same problem also manifests itself on the B-side, 'You Do Something To Me', which *also* sounds like a song that should have rather been donated to the DC5. Perhaps part of the problem lies in the fact that Ray and Dave were never that great at singing in harmony — or, if I am mistaken here, that Ray was never that great at multi-tracking his own voice. Isolated, they have a ton of personality; together, they exude neither beauty nor power, but rather just a tolerable background buzz, and the added echo effect does not help in the least. That said, I will be the first to admit that at least 'You Do Something To Me' is a finely written composition with clear signs of Ray's melodic genius — with a better, more «Kinky» type of arrangement it could have nicely fit inside their hot parade of pop nuggets.

Anyway, neither of these two songs made an impression on the charts, meaning that both would be shunned and humiliated when the time came for their first LP. Third time around (under heavy pressure from Pye to move it or lose it), the Davies brothers decided to go with something edgier — and, as legend would have it, ended up accidentally inventing garage rock with 'You Really Got Me', the song that launched a thousand ships and is still a matter of controversy among those who insist that the guitar solo was played by Jimmy Page rather than Dave Davies. (Non-spoiler: it was not; but the drums, apparently, *were* played by session man Bobby Graham rather than the Kinks' regular drummer, Mick Avory). Not that the solo is some sort of technical marvel or anything — no, it merely features Dave figuratively setting himself on fire and acting

a bit Neanderthal, which, in the timid days of 1964, was still a novel thing to do. (There is also not the least doubt on my part that the solo was heavily influenced by Keith Richards' similarly Neanderthal break on 'It's All Over Now', considering that the Stones' single had only just come out in June and must have been in heavy rotation in the Davies' camp).

Regardless, I think that even today it is easy to see how the riff of 'You Really Got Me' could have produced the effect of the fuckin' motherlode — *especially* the realization that you could record something wild and simple like that in the studio, get it distributed through an official network and make serious royalties on it. Up to this day, Ray and Dave Davies continue to fight about the recording, which Ray defends as quintessentially *his* song, one that helped him form his own artistic identity, and Dave treasures as that one song which helped *him* find the quintessential hard rock sound of the Kinks, with his semi-legendary story of poking the band's little amplifier with a pin and discovering early rock nirvana. I would say the dispute is a little futile, considering how quickly the band would move away from that sound altogether — it is, in fact, quite ironic that they would forever be branded as the «forefathers of hard rock» when the absolute majority of their greatest songs would have nothing to do whatsoever with hard rock (no to mention their late Seventies / early Eighties «comeback», when the harder they tried to rock, the more they usually failed at it). But then again, the early-to-mid Sixties were a great time for all sorts of wonderful historical accidents and absurdities, and if we can even accept Ted Nugent as a psychedelic rock hero, what's wrong with accepting Ray Davies as a dangerous, sexually menacing, hard-rocking caveman?

That the Kinks were not able to immediately capitalize on the success of 'You Really Got Me' with a consistent LP is no big surprise. The brothers were, after all, still only learning their songwriting craft when the single began to really took off and, in a fairly predictable move, Pye Records and producer Shel Talmy immediately pushed them back into the studio where they simply did not have enough time to come up with much of anything. Sure, six out of fourteen songs were still credited to Ray Davies — a respectable recognition of the man's talent by the industry superiors — but of these six, 'Revenge' (co-credited with manager Larry Page) is just a Link Wray / Ventures-style harmonica-driven surf-blues-rock vamp, and 'So Mystifying', once you listen closely, is a hilariously embarrassing — and utterly pointless — rewrite of the very same 'It's All Over Now' which had already just influenced the guitar solo in 'You Really Got Me'.

Of the remaining originals, 'Just Can't Go To Sleep' is another clumsy piece, this time written more in the Merseybeat than Tottenham style, with its crudely swallowed syllables ("every night I jes can't *goat sleep*...") contributing to an altogether unconvincing atmosphere of I-don't-really-know-what. 'I Took My Baby Home' (which, by the way, was originally the B-side to 'Long Tall Sally') is a rewrite of Allen Toussaint's 'Fortune Teller', with only the last line of each verse rewritten to

give the song more of a nursery-pop feel; less irony, more corn. Only 'Stop Your Sobbing' has more or less endured as a very minor Ray classic (enough to be chosen by the Pretenders as their debut single in 1979) — it is here that we actually see the man beginning to uncover the magic of his own voice, which works best in a context of emotional sympathy and consolation. Fate would rather have Ray Davies become not one of the great romantic lovers, but one of the great musical psychotherapists, and 'Stop Your Sobbing' is his first attempt at graduating — still a relative failure, because I think the chorus gives us a fussy and generally unsatisfactory resolution (that "better stop *sobb'n* now" would have never gotten the Paul McCartney seal of approval), but at least he is definitely on the right track here.

In between these beginner's exercises, we have the usual stuff so typical of contemporary UK R&B. Namely, there are a couple of Chuck Berry covers: 'Beautiful Delilah' opens the album with an early example of brother Dave's distinctive voice, nasal *and* guttural at the same time, grossly exaggerated and making him sound like the local snotty teenage wimp trying to pull off a tough guy image (for the record, I've always found Dave's vocal overtones strangely off-putting even in real life, compared to the softer and more distinctive voice of his brother — see for yourself, for instance, in [this short interview](#) with both from 1968). 'Too Much Monkey Business' partially compensates for this travesty with the best lead guitar impression of Chuck Berry this side of Keith Richards (do check specifically the alternate take included in the CD bonus tracks — it is sped up to an insane proto-Ramones tempo and was probably rejected as *too* sloppy and vulgar, but in retrospect it is one of the fastest, craziest rave-ups from 1964 that Father Time was kind enough to leave us).

If the band's Chuck Berry has about 50/50 chance of working, their bluesier R&B grooves are even less lucky. Slim Harpo's 'Got Love If You Want It' is bold enough to stretch out for almost four minutes, but the band is nowhere near as tight, loud, or convincing as the Yardbirds for such rave-ups, and Dave Davies as the devil-ridden terrifying womanizer has nothing on Mick Jagger. Meanwhile, Bo Diddley's 'Cadillac' shows that, while they *could* be as musically tight as the Animals if the stars aligned all right, the lack of a convincingly raunchy singer of the Eric Burdon type in the band still rendered their Animalisms essentially useless. Tommy Tucker's 'Long Tall Shorty', an obscure rarity (actually, just a re-write of his own better known 'Hi-Heel Sneakers', and sounding on the whole like a completely generic Jimmy Reed blues-rock number), could be inoffensively forgettable if not for another one of Dave's barely bearable vocal performances. Finally, there is no reason to listen to Dave's equally unsavory take on the song 'I'm A Lover, Not A Fighter' if you can lay your hands on the [obscure original by Lazy Lester](#) from way back in 1958 (Leslie Johnson plays that guitar with just as much flair as Dave here, and he is a *much* better singer by a country mile).

Adding insult to injury are two «songs» forced on the band by Shel Talmy, in a standard-for-the-time arrangement which helped the producer make more cash from record sales — ‘Bald Headed Woman’ and ‘I’ve Been Driving On Bald Mountain’, both of them just covers of old blues / folk tunes with no copyright restrictions. Actually, ‘Bald Headed Woman’ does not really sound that bad — the band, augmented by several distinct keyboard parts (it is rumored that Jon Lord himself, of future Deep Purple fame, plays the organ here), gets a cool wall-of-sound going on by the end, somewhat presaging the controlled chaos atmosphere of the Who’s debut a year later (not *that* surprising, considering that it would also be produced by Shel Talmy... and that the Who would be *another* band to whom he’d peddle ‘Bald Headed Woman’). But the very fact of presenting this stuff as Shel Talmy originals, along with references to bald mountains and bald headed women on both of the tracks, makes the whole thing look ridiculous.

Still, looking back on it as a whole, **Kinks** is not such a complete embarrassment as it is often made out to be in critical circles. ‘You Really Got Me’ and ‘Stop Your Sobbing’ act as anchors here, showing that the band had already found its main voices — the hard rock groove and the soothing pop serenade — and simply did not have enough time in store to follow them exclusively. The rock’n’roll covers already show Dave Davies as a fiery-spirited, crunchy guitar player with garage-punk ambitions, even if his singing leaves a lot to be desired (then again, I openly admit that there are people who really appreciate the timbre of his voice here, considering it to be suitably arrogant and obnoxious for this material — no accounting for taste indeed). And even when they are at their objective worst, the record remains listenable — there is a healthy rock’n’roll vibe running through it all, showing that they were clearly on the «authentically genuine» side of the newly emerging pop sound, rather than the «commercially glossy» side. Even those early originals which try to emulate the Dave Clark Five, through their very sloppiness and shagginess, show that the Kinks would not be the ones to powder up their music for mainstream public appeal.

So I guess you could call the album an auspicious debut, if nothing else; and in this particular case, even the bonus tracks are of questionable quality, concentrating on the early and still under-cooked singles. Of course, at least one of them is essential — ‘All Day And All Of The Night’, the immediate follow-up to ‘You Really Got Me’ which almost (but not quite) made it to #1 itself. However, pretty much the *only* thing distinguishing it from ‘You Really Got Me’ is a slightly more complex, though equally catchy and somewhat self-resolving riff — other than that, it is almost ridiculous how the song completely apes the structure and mood of its predecessor, which is why I have always been sitting on the fence about it. In some ways, I almost prefer the B-side of ‘You Really Got Me’, the R&B vamp ‘It’s Alright’ on which Ray seems to be intentionally trying to pull off the intensity and nastiness of Eric Burdon — and almost succeeds! (Not the B-side of ‘All

Day', though: 'I Gotta Move' is just a slight variation on Billy Boy Arnold's 'I Wish You Would', though they do get a nice acoustic / bass groove going on).

The bonus tracks also include all of the **Kinksize Session** EP from November '64, on which you can hear the perennial classic 'Louie, Louie' sung with marginally *comprehensible* lyrics; 'I've Got That Feeling', which is about as much of a collective rip-off of all sorts of music ideas from **A Hard Day's Night** as one could stomach (though "let me tell you 'bout a girl I know" is, of course, rather quoted from Chuck Berry); and 'I Gotta Go Now', notable for Ray's vocal stretching and exploring his breathy falsetto range for the first time in Kinks history, something that would become quite common for him already in 1965. All in all, most of this stuff is absolutely indispensable not just for a historian of the Kinks, but for any aspiring young songwriter in need of understanding how to hone one's songwriting craft, and go from clumsy raw talent to breathtaking genius over the shortest time span possible.





KINDA KINKS

Album released:

March 5, 1965

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More info:



Tracks: 1) Look For Me Baby; 2) Got My Feet On The Ground; 3) Nothin' In The World Can Stop Me Worryin' 'Bout That Girl; 4) **Naggin' Woman**; 5) Wonder Where My Baby Is Tonight; 6) **Tired Of Waiting For You**; 7) Dancing In The Street; 8) Don't Ever Change; 9) Come On Now; 10) So Long; 11) You Shouldn't Be Sad; 12) Something Better Beginning; 13*) Everybody's Gonna Be Happy; 14*) Who'll Be The Next In Line; 15*) Set Me Free; 16*) I Need You; 17*) **See My Friends**; 18*) Never Met A Girl Like You Before; 19*) Wait Till Summer Comes Along; 20*) Such A Shame; 21*) A Well Respected Man; 22*) Don't You Fret; 23*) I Go To Sleep (demo).

REVIEW

1965 started out on a really high note for the Davies brothers: January 15 saw the release of 'Tired Of Waiting For You', which is, in a number of ways, one of the most significant songs in their entire career. For one thing, it became their biggest ever chart hit in the US (yes, even higher than 'Lola'!), completing the hit trilogy with 'You Really Got Me' and 'All Day And All Of The Night' and reliably securing a place for the Kinks in the rock history annals of the American critical establishment — one might argue that if not for the popularity of those early recordings in 1964-65, the latter might have easily slept out the already less-than-cool Britishness of 'Sunny Afternoon' and 'Waterloo Sunset' at the dawn of the new Psychedelic Age.



More importantly, it was just a new type of song — if we stretch out the application of the term for a mile, we might just as well call it the first «power ballad» ever written. While it began life on the umbilical cord of that soft, colorful, jangly arpeggiated lead line from the folk-pop circuit, it did not *really* deliver until brother Dave came up with the idea of adding

(almost) the exact same hard-rocking, distorted sound of 'You Really Got Me' for counterpoint — and it is all but impossible to properly describe to which extent the song is elevated by the added boost of the grumbly "da-doom, da-doom" G-F riff. Basically, it combines the best of both worlds available to pop musicians at the time, and in a way that makes perfect sense: after all, why can't a song be «soft» and «hard» at the same time? He loves her — that's soft — but she just won't commit — that's hard — and there you go, simple as that.

You can see how rudimentary the pop writing approach still remains in some matters: for one thing, the lyrics, endlessly recycling the same chorus, the same single verse and the same single bridge, are even less advanced than the Beatles' contemporary exercises in teen-pop (though they do fit in well with the musical mood). For another, the song delivers all of its goods exactly one minute into the proceedings, with no additional ideas for extra melodic and harmonic overlays (again, the Beatles were miles ahead here at the time, having already learned the lesson that if you end the song *exactly* the same way that you began it, you have not properly fulfilled your duty). Yet in that one minute, they manage at least *two* major feats — first, the phenomenal soft-hard juxtaposition, and then the declaration of one of the Sixties' most beautiful musical instruments, namely Ray Davies' breathy-nasal falsetto on the "it's your life..." bit, which I personally will take over Paul McCartney's *and* Brian Wilson's upper ranges any time of day, given how it adds a whole extra dimension to the predictable «tenderness» effect. Which dimension? I'm actually still trying to understand that. It's either a little bit of unsettling irony, or a touch of grim melancholy, or maybe both. When Paul and Brian go for falsetto, it's like "you're so beautiful, girl". When Ray does the same, it's like "you're so beautiful, girl, but the universe is expanding and we're all gonna die". I don't know about you, but to me this automatically makes Ray the coolest of the three.

For the record, the single also clearly established, once and for all, who of the two brothers would be riding first class and who would be taking coach: Brother Dave clearly takes the main responsibility for the B-side 'Come On Now', which, in contrast to the A-side, is a fun, but one-dimensional pop-rocker which, furthermore, commits the travesty of outright stealing the riff to the Beatles' 'I Feel Fine' for its primary groove. Additionally, Brother Ray is clearly waiting for his Special One to come into his life, whereas Brother Dave is just waiting for some broad to accompany him to an evening dance party while she is too busy fixing her face... hey, what do you mean «it's the *same* broad»? Oh, right, they're time traveling and singing about Patti Boyd. It's the frickin' distance from 'Layla' to 'Wonderful Tonight' all over again. Anyway, good song, but nowhere near the monumentality of 'Tired Of Waiting For You', of course. (Might I also add that the backing vocals sound silly — it's as if Dave were a Mafia guy and all of his henchmen were trying to break into the lady's boudoir).

The success of 'Tired Of Waiting For You' clearly showed that the group would go way beyond the one-hit wonder status: after all, 'All Day And All Of The Night' did milk precisely the same formula as 'You Really Got Me', but 'Tired Of Waiting' was already something significantly different — still linked to the previous hits with the same stylistic elements, but taking a distinct side turn and promising future creative growth without compromising quality. Naturally, this meant going back into the studio and making another album, and this time, actually going all the way trying to make it a proper *album*, rather than just a lousy collection of filler, hastily assembled around a hit single.

For all the progress that Ray and Dave Davies brought to the world during their peak period of 1966–1969, it can be very seriously argued that no other gap between any two of their classic albums required taking such a giant leap forward as the distance between **Kinks** and **Kinda Kinks** — and I know this is hard to believe just by looking at the uninventiveness of the actual album titles, but give them some slack for popularizing the letter K back in the day (I mean, why should the Klan be taking all that glory instead?). Even if there are relatively few truly timeless classics on **Kinda Kinks** that could match the power of 'Tired Of Waiting For You', what is important is that it finally sounds, *on the whole*, like a proper Kinks album, one where the band consistently comes into its own and nobody else's style. This is, of course, a subjective judgement, but at least it is objectively backed by the fact that 10 out of 12 songs here are credited to Davies (usually to Ray) — compared to just five on the first LP — reflecting an exceptionally fast rate at which Ray was beginning to turn into one of Britain's finest young songwriters, a fact that he himself could hardly have predicted even one year earlier.

Next to an entire load of botched, poorly thought out covers on **Kinks**, easily the only atavistic reminder of their crummy fumbling from yesteryear is 'Naggin' Woman', rather an odd choice for a cover at this moment — originally recorded by little-known vocalist and harmonica player from Mississippi by the name of Jimmy Anderson, which even in its original incarnation sounded like an average wannabe-Jimmy Reed number. For his delivery, brother Dave once again selects his obnoxiously exaggerated nasal voice and pushes it so much further than either Jimmy Reed *or* Jimmy Anderson that I can almost literally smell bits of drunk vomit in the air, and it is not so much «authentic and gritty» as «stupid and nasty». I do appreciate Dave cleverly reproducing the proverbial «nagginess» of the woman in question with minimalistic, whiny guitar licks (as opposed to Anderson's harmonica in the original), but that instrumental break is probably the only salvageable component of the entire disaster. Leave that back in 1964, will you, please?

On the other hand, they fare surprisingly better with upbeat Motown material, provided it has been properly Kinkified: Ray sings Martha & the Vandellas' 'Dancing In The Street' with plenty of idealistic-romantic aplomb, but it is the raw, swirling,

scratchy rhythm guitar playing which makes the song — lacking either the budget or the experience to emulate the original's glorious brass arrangement, the Kinks put everything they have into the guitar groove, and make it into a kick-ass sample of young British rhythm'n'blues. (I have no idea why the band's biographers keep calling the cover bland and colorless: maybe they think that Ray's nasal voice cannot convey the jubilant enthusiasm of the original, and they may have something there, but the tough rhythmic groove comes out as far more «street-wise» than Motown's glossy original. If you want a truly bland cover of the song, check out the Tages' version, which just hangs on one chord from start to finish).

Turning now to original material, it is true that, next to the ground-shattering breakthrough of 'Tired Of Waiting For You', the rest of **Kinda Kinks** may feel lackluster in comparison — and, well, it probably is, considering how much Ray used to berate producer Shel Talmy for forcing the band to record it in a mere two weeks' time (for comparison, the Beatles would use the results from seven different sessions, extended over a three-month period, to put together their second LP). Even so, most of the originals still represent tiny slices of catchy, emotionally resonant pop-rock with all sorts of subtle twists, particularly the lengthy stretch on Side B which begins with 'Don't Ever Change'.

Of the two truly original compositions on **Kinks**, it is the 'Stop Your Sobbing' model rather than 'You Really Got Me' that Ray keeps following — maybe not exactly *inventing* the formula of «consolation-pop», but trying his best to associate it with his own name, once and for ever. Under his direction, the Kinks are building up their own little «safe space» on the market, a sort of musical shelter for all those young girls who, after having their hearts burned down by the Beatles and their other organs soaked wet by the Stones, could find peace and relaxation by gently weeping on Uncle Ray's comforting shoulder (whether Uncle Ray had his own ulterior creepy motives staked out or not is an open question, but at least he was freshly married at the time). Although most of these songs are romantic, they are perhaps even less sexual in nature than those of the Beach Boys — not to mention the complete lack of any traces of misogyny or the slightest disrespect towards representatives of the opposite sex, so common among young British rhythm'n'blues players at the time (not least because they were following the role models of African-American bluesmen — there's your 'Naggin' Woman' for you).

Mr. Ray Davies ain't no Jimmy Reed, though, nor is he John Lennon, Mick Jagger, or Eric Burdon. Instead of telling her that "it's all over now", or that "you can't do that", or that he's "gonna send her back to Walker", or even that this happened once before when he came to her door, etc. etc., all Mr. Ray wants to do is to sincerely wish her a "don't you ever change now, always stay the same now", to tell her that she "shouldn't be sad", and to go on record with the confession that the only thing that holds him still is the memory of her sweet caress. In fact, if it wasn't for the memory of her sweet caress, he would

have probably asked for political asylum in the USSR while traveling through Sheremetyevo Airport in 1966 — after all, he's got no time for Muswell town any more...

Exceptions still exist: the excruciatingly long-titled 'Nothing In The World Can Stop Me From Worryin' Bout That Girl' does tell the story of a nasty two-timer who "just kept on lying" to poor Mr. Ray. But even with this kind of hurt, all it leads to is quiet heartbreak rather than anger — there isn't a single insult in the lyrics, and the song, a minimalistic piece of blues-pop whose acoustic riff incidentally predicts the guitar melody of Simon & Garfunkel's 'Mrs. Robinson' three years later, is quiet, sulky, and sad, rather than vindictive. And on 'Something Better Beginning', a song written so obviously in the style of the Ronettes that it simply *screams* for a wall-of-sound production which Shel Talmy cannot grant it, Ray is clearly singing about a break-up — but he never ever mentions who was the culprit, and the song on the whole is all about optimism and faith in, well, something better beginning. Note the little lyrical nod to the Beatles — "then I saw you standing there..." — which is most likely intentional, as Ray intends to emphasize the psychological distance between himself and Paul McCartney. The latter — silly naïve boy that he is — seems to think that "now I'll never dance with another" (yeah, go tell that to Jane Asher), while the former — wise old guy that he is — is all about thinking ahead: "Each step that I took with you / Brought one thing closer to my mind / Is this the start of another heartbreaker?.."

It is precisely these little things which make all these tunes, as simplistic as they are on the surface, sound *believable* — almost from the very start, Ray is not interested in simply churning out one commercial, formulaic pop song after another; instead (somewhat similar to the role of the Shangri-Las across the Atlantic), his purpose is to think up short stories of realistic human relationships, and although at this point he was not yet fully consistent (stuff like 'Wonder Where My Baby Is Tonight', unimaginatively attached to the riff of 'Can I Get A Witness' and chucked over to brother Dave to sing, is still fairly cartoonish), most of these boy-meets-girl stories are as true to life as the band's soon-to-follow social miniatures of everyday routine in the UK.

From a pure melodic standpoint, Ray's compositions for now are still arguably weaker than contemporary Beatles stuff, but already at this point the musical avatar of Ray Davies comes across as a living and breathing person asking for our empathy, whereas the true-to-life, psychologically believable personal sides of Lennon and McCartney would still take a couple years to truly emerge from under all the artistic craft (in a way, one might argue that it was not until the Beatles began to disintegrate as a group, around the time of **The White Album**, that their output became notably less theatrical in nature). It is from *that* point, for instance, that one should evaluate Ray's many scathing criticisms of the Beatles in 1965-66 (see his

notoriously devastating review of **Revolver**, for instance) — while jealousy was certainly one of the factors, the defining one was unquestionably the huge gap between the two bands' musical ethics and aesthetics. Even at this dawning period of the British Invasion, Ray Davies could never have written 'If I Fell', and John Lennon could never have written 'Nothing In This World Can Stop Me From Putting Together Such Long Song Titles'.

That said, for all the goodness contained within **Kinda Kinks**, it *was* a rushed LP, and the Kinks *were* still essentially a singles-oriented band at this point. Consequently, no other album in the band's entire catalog benefited greater from the arrival of the CD era, when it became possible to expand it by including all of their singles released in between **Kinda Kinks** and **The Kink Kontroversy** — and so bear with me just a tad longer while I allow myself to drool a bit over the best of those, or maybe even a bit longer than just a bit, given that the bonus tracks almost double the length of the album, and *almost* each of those is a tiny gem in its own rights.

We begin on a relatively humble note with the double punch of 'Everybody's Gonna Be Happy' and 'Who'll Be The Next In Line', both of them energetic pop rockers but not *quite* what the public was expecting from the Kinks in March '65, because, come on, where is that 'You Really Got Me'-style crunch? Have the boys run out of needles to stick in amplifiers? Not even Mick Avory, with some great proto-funky drum fills on 'Be Happy', could turn the tide of dissatisfaction. Honestly, while both songs are fun and catchy, they are also not particularly «Kinky» — each of them could be performed by the likes of, say, Cliff Bennett or any such second-rate British rhythm'n'blues performer.

But the great run is back after this relative setback. 'Set Me Free' brings back, loud and proud, the powerful crunch of the two-chord riff (G-Am instead of G-F this time), and while on the surface it seems to bring back the formula of 'Tired Of Waiting For You', emotionally it is completely different. It is, in fact, an emotional *sequel* to 'Tired Of Waiting': now that it finally becomes clear that the girl is going to keep the poor guy hanging for the rest of his life, he implores her to break the spell — which is, of course, impossible. If the G-F riff was that of heavy brooding, then the G-Am riff is the one of rattling chains dragging across the floor (and, in a rare case of modern technology improving upon an old classic, I think that the live performance of the song on the band's **To The Bone** album in 1996, with Dave adding wholesale grungy distortion to the original riff, conveys that effect even more sharply). Even more effective is Ray's singing — that moment when his choked, strained, almost glottalic plea of "set-me-free little girl" pushes high into the falsetto range of "...you can DO it if you TRY..." is a *bitch* to properly pull off, one of the greatest vocal tricks of his entire career and the #1 source of magic for this particular song, and by «magic» I do indeed mean «I have not the slightest idea why it moves me so much, but the

doctor said it makes my heart jump, my eyes tear up, and my heart to go out there and bring a five-ton package of peace, love, and understanding for humanity». One of those field days for biochemistry, I guess.

The anti-climactic news is that the B-side of that single was 'I Need You', which not only shares its simplistic title with a better George Harrison song from the same year, but is actually a *third* stylistic rewrite of 'You Really Got Me'; alas, unlike 'Set Me Free', it does not push its immediate stylistic predecessor to further heights and depths, but merely walks the same walk one more time. Ironically, the opening power chords feature a bit of stinging feedback which could have made the waves, had it been released half a year earlier; as it is, the trick seems to be fully derivative of the Beatles' use of feedback at the start of 'I Feel Fine', further contributing to the humiliation of the song. Fortunately, a B-side is a B-side — if it's good, you can quickly retitle it as «the second A-side», and if it's not, you can quickly forget it ever existed in the first place.

The next single, while (on a personal level) not nearly as gut-wrenching as 'Set Me Free', was far more important for the history of rock music: 'See My Friends' — one of the first pop songs to incorporate genuine Indian motives. Unfortunately, the Yardbirds beat Ray by a couple of weeks with their own 'Heart Full Of Soul', but you could at least argue that *in spirit*, the droning, meditative nature of 'See My Friends' brings it closer to the conception of a rāga than the Yardbirds song (an opinion shared by Peter Lavezzoli in his fairly monumental exploration, *Dawn Of Indian Music In The West*). Ironically, even though the Yardbirds did record a sitar version, neither of the two bands ended up having a sitar on the commercial recording, which *still* gives the final honours to the Beatles on 'Norwegian Wood'.

Allegedly, the song was inspired by the band's brief stopover in Bombay on their way to Australia, and Ray would later claim that its lyrics were a tribute to the death (in 1957) of his elder sister Rene — which, not coincidentally, makes 'See My Friends' deeply innovative for the band not only in terms of music, but also in terms of lyrical subject, going way beyond the boy-meets-girl theme. Subtly conforming to the age-old folk tradition, the droning lament depersonalizes the singer, with Ray relying on multi-tracked vocals, wedged fairly deep inside the mix and making him sound a wee bit closer to an actual group of chanting Indian fishermen than he might even have intended to. Small surprise that critics did not exactly get the song at the time, and the public bought fewer copies of the single than was expected (though it still reached #10 on the charts) — the whole thing was way too far ahead of the kind of sound that grabbed the public's attention at the time.

Heck, even today, when listening to this stuff, I am not sure of what my exact emotional reaction is; maybe it is actually close to what I am feeling when putting on a Ravi Shankar piece — which would, in its own way, already serve as a major compliment to Ray Davies, though I have to warn you that I have not the faintest idea of what that feeling is. Pacification?

Humility? Self-loss in the almighty Brahman? Let's just admit that it was, and still is, a very cool way to sing about death (certainly a much less pretentious one than 'Great Gig In The Sky'), and leave it at that. Also, the B-side sucks: 'Never Met A Girl Like You Before' starts out like it's going to be a re-write of 'Tired Of Waiting For You', then quickly becomes a rip-off of the Beatles' 'She's A Woman', with throwaway lyrics and retarded vocal tones. But I guess if they'd made it the A-side instead, the single might have charted higher than it did.

Finally, the last single on this run is yet *another* important milestone: 'A Well Respected Man' is chronologically the very first in a long and honorable series of Ray Davies' social portraits — it might not be the most melodically polished of them all, and, in fact, its strolling rhythm would eventually be recycled for superior creations like 'Dedicated Follower Of Fashion' and 'Dandy', but a first is a first, and it allows us to put an approximate date (September '65) to the emergence of Ray Davies as the Charles Dickens of Sixties' pop-rock. The B-side, 'Such A Shame', is this time quite commendable in itself: the musical style of the song, all choppy power chords and complex, crashing drum patterns, puts it close to the 1965 pop style of the Who, but Roger Daltrey could never have conveyed an atmosphere of such depressed gloom as Ray was capable of with his "it's a shame, such a shame, such a shame" mantra which he repeats and repeats mechanistically, like a punished schoolboy in the classroom corner.

For the sake of completeness, I also have to mention that the reissue adds two more tracks that were previously available on the 4-track EP **Kwyet Kinks** (also released in September '65), which, in addition to 'A Well Respected Man' and 'Such A Shame', contained probably the first ever *good* song written by Brother Dave ('Wait Till Summer Comes Along', a pretty country-pop-rocker which he even manages to sing in an acceptable voice), and the wonderfully fussy 'Don't You Fret', a song written by Ray in an almost Appalachian folk style and culminating in a crazy wall of sonic noise which would also have made the Who truly proud... except it's all done with *acoustic* guitars. (There's no evidence that they smashed them upon completing the record, either). Finally, last, but not least, is the previously unpublished piano demo of 'I Go To Sleep', a song that would be donated to the Applejacks (and still much later covered by the Pretenders); the Applejacks honestly completed the recording and made it publishable, but Ray sings the song far more beautifully, leaving behind yet another little melancholic masterpiece — which, for that matter, also concludes this behemoth of a CD on a surprisingly intimate, solitary note, something which probably would not have worked for the Beatles, but retroactively feels like a totally natural move for the Kinks. Slow this song even further down, polish its production, and it would not feel out of place on a classic cold, atmospheric album such as Brian Eno's **Before And After Science**.

Altogether, that makes for 23 tracks worth of material and, as I already mentioned, probably *the* single most fruitful year for the Kinks in terms of their artistic evolution. At the end of 1964, they were a bunch of fashionably dressed young punks who had accidentally learned how to crunch a great distorted riff — nothing guaranteed that they would be coming here to stay, much less follow a Beatlesque model of constant evolution and self-improvement. By the fall of 1965, they'd learned to root out most of their early flaws, develop their own trajectory of songwriting, invent the power ballad, delve into Indian influences, and begin incorporating social critique and irony into the 2-minute pop song — and that's just the *major* achievements, see?

From a certain point of view, everything that Ray would be doing for the next four years — the most glorious ones of the band's career — would simply be perfecting and deepening the formulae developed during this period. And while the actual LP, as indicated above, does not yet reflect the band's full potential, the magnificent run of singles from March to September of 1965 most certainly does. The only reasons why they still feel a bit like a rehearsal are technical — lack of experience in the studio, lack of technological breakthroughs, *and* the fact that pop music was still only on the verge of being recognized as a genuine art form. In late 1965, it was still possible for a band like the Kinks to write a song like 'Never Met A Girl Like You Before' (or for a band like the Beatles to write a song like 'Wait', for that matter). Fast forward one year, or maybe even just a few months, and you'd already need a band like the Ramones to do that kind of thing, which would be a whole other story altogether.

