

LOS BRINCOS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
1964–1970	Classic pop rock	<i>Cry</i> (1964)

Only Solitaire

Artist: *Los Brincos*

Years: *1964*

George Starostin's Reviews

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Album released:

1964

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Tracks: 1) Dance "The Pulga"; 2) Es Para Ti; 3) Nila; 4) I'm Not Bad; 5) Bye Bye Chiquilla; 6) I Can't Make It; 7) Flamenco; 8) Shag It; 9) Es Como Un Sueño; 10) Cry; 11) What's The Matter With You; 12) Don't Doubt.

REVIEW

It is curious, and even a bit ironic, that arguably the single most notable rock LP to come out of continental Europe in 1964 — the year that Beatlemania changed the world forever — appeared not in Germany, or France, or Italy, or any of the other free countries, but in Francoist Spain, a place where you would reasonably expect the powers-that-be to tighten their censorial grip on sinful youth practices with much the same harshness as in the Soviet Union (where the first «true» rock albums did not officially appear on the market until the early Eighties). Rock music itself penetrated Spain fairly early (allegedly, with the opening of American military bases in the mid-1950s), but record labels were not particularly interested in strange young bands in the pre-Beatles era, and even if they did sign them up, restricted them to small bunches of singles and an occasional EP. And the bands themselves were usually not too great, tentatively mixing local pop standards with shades of rock'n'roll (or, more commonly, doo-wop and twist) influences, e.g. [Los Pájaros Locos](#) ("The Crazy Birds"), whose sound is about as totally inoffensive as could be expected for the time — the relative equivalent of early French yé-yé: harmless fun in the evening, not much to remember in the morning.



Then along came Los Brincos, whose very name was vaguely suggestive of a link with the Beatles, and Spain was never the same after that — at least, that's how it is often presented in history books. The «Spanish Beatles» were formed in Madrid, sometime in late 1963 or early 1964, around drummer Fernando Arbex, formerly of Los Estudiantes, one of those early lite-rock ensembles sometimes credited with releasing the first ever Spanish rock EP in 1959. After the disintegration of that band, Arbex put together a new one, clearly modeled after the Beatles, with Manuel González on bass and two guitar players and singers — Juan Pardo and the Philippine-born Antonio Morales Junior. By the end of 1964, they managed to sign up with the pioneering indie label Novola (= *nueva ola* "New Wave"), releasing a few tentative singles and then, lo and behold, an entire LP of original compositions before Christmas '64, officially making this Spain's first ever genuinely «rock» album, and, for that matter, maybe even the first ever genuinely «rock» album outside the English-speaking world, though of this I cannot be entirely sure (and, of course, it does depend on what exactly we consider «rock»).

In any case, it goes without saying that these circumstances make **Los Brincos** a record of major historical importance, not just for Spain, but for the history of the evolution of popular music worldwide (though, honestly, I am not sure if it ever had any direct influence on European pop-rock beyond the Iberian Peninsula). Do they, however, make it worth checking out if you are *not* a Spanish teenager in the year 1964? (and, unless you have a time machine and I don't, you are probably not). The key factor in such matters is nearly always that little criterion which I call *adequacy*: in this case — the capacity of young people coming from a completely different culture to not only understand and capture the spirit of their foreign idols, but also masterfully transform it with bits and pieces of their own cultural identity, creating an interesting hybrid without making it sound embarrassing for anyone with a critical eye. (If I had me a TV show or a podcast, I'd make sure to rattle that last sentence off in two seconds, so as not to embarrass anyone with a critical eye).

I am not sure that the band's first singles were an overwhelming success in that department, but at least they most certainly tried to follow that precise recipe. 'Cry' is a slow, mournful, but loud ballad that tries to integrate bits of American soul, Beatlesque harmonies (the falsetto *oooohs* come straight from 'She Loves You'), and Spanish flavor — the acoustic flamenco guitar part that creeps in during the bridge section certainly could not appear in such a form on any Beatles album from that time. Muddy lo-fi production values and rather strained vocals prevent the song from being stunning (fortunately, at least the native accent is not too terribly strong to ruin the picture), but there is enough originality in the songwriting to deserve at least a pat on the back for the effort. (Also, kudos for the opening a cappella vocals — that starting "I-I-I-I-I..." has an almost proto-progressive rock coloring to it, I'm sure Jon Anderson and Yes would have been proud).

More of an impact was made by the B-side, unabashedly entitled 'Flamenco', sung in Spanish and sounding like Del Shannon in a ruffle collar — its fast tempo, rising harmonies, and melancholic mood give out a strong 'Runaway' vibe, but the acoustic flamenco guitar is indeed out there, though the muddy, bass-heavy production takes it out of view after the introduction. However, it is quite a catchy and efficient song, well worth the effort and well on the way on becoming a big international hit, had it been sung in English by better vocalists and featured sharper production values. As it is, it only became a big hit in Spain, but it was enough to put Los Brincos on the map anyway.

Actually, now that I think about it, 'Cry / Flamenco' must have been the band's *second* single; the first one was much less distinctive from a national point of view, but more important to classify Los Brincos as a «rock» group. 'Dance "The Pulga"', the band's own take on inventing a new dance form (*pulga* is 'flea' in Spanish), opens with a pretty dirty, scruffy guitar riff of the garage variety, and although the song's melody owes more to the pre-Beatlesque surf-rock and twist traditions, its frantic tempo, «unclean» guitar tones, and heavy bass scream teenage rebellion in a way that neither the Belmonts nor the Shadows could ever ascend to (or stoop to, whichever way you prefer to judge it). There doesn't seem to be anything too distinctly Spanish about it, but not a lot of people played the musical styles of 1961 with the fervor of a garage rock band from 1964–65 — and much the same goes for the B-side 'Bye Bye Chiquilla', which takes the melody of Chuck Berry's 'Memphis Tennessee', sets it to a nursery pop vocal melody, and plays it with much the same sloppy garage enthusiasm. It's an odd combination whose exact goals are somewhat unclear, but at least it's fun to try and figure them out.

Both these singles are on the album, and the rest of it is somewhat evenly spread between soulful ballads, Beatlesque pop-rock, and R&B-style rave-ups — the latter showing that Los Brincos were clearly interested in mastering not only the melodic innovations of their Anglo-American influences, but the rhythmic, «body-oriented» ones as well ('What's The Matter With You' is much closer to Manfred Mann than the Beatles, for instance). Everything is fairly hit-and-miss here: for each weak, uninventive track like 'Es Para Ti' (an uninteresting emulation of the Beach Boys' 'Surfer Girl' style, or was that the Beatles' 'This Boy' style? whatever), there is something much more impressive, like the ballad 'Don't Doubt', which starts out ordinarily but quickly moves into highly soulful territory, with a first-rate harmony arrangement that both of the above-mentioned bands would have probably appreciated.

There are also some fun moments which probably could exist only on a Spanish record like this one — for instance, an oddly slowed down, bombastic, loud and soulful pop number called... 'Shag It' (!): my guess is that they probably wanted some quirky twist on 'Shake It', saw that the first dictionary meaning for "shag" is "shake" and went ahead with it, thus basically

involuntarily creating the world's first song called 'Fuck It' — in a country with the harshest censorship system in Western Europe at the time, no less. It actually makes me a little sad that the song is so slow, though they still cook up a pretty impressive wall of sound by the end, with wild guitar solos, frantic screaming mixed in with Beatles-influenced vocal harmonies, and heavy abuse of those cymbals.

In the end, I must say that the album exceeded my expectations. The band's impressive reliance on their own material, rather than predictably inferior rock'n'roll covers, is a huge factor here (though I do wonder whether the lack of covers was not more due to censorship issues, as it indeed was in the Soviet Union, where you could only get away with releasing a Chuck Berry song if you rewrote it as one of your own), and Los Brincos did have enough creativity to not simply set stolen melodies to their own lyrics, but try and fiddle with the chords themselves. Sound quality is probably the worst issue here, as well as a sneak suspicion that they sing so frequently in harmony because both singers' individual voices happened to be relatively weak and unexpressive. But stuff like 'Flamenco', 'Don't Doubt', and 'Dance "The Pulga"' could easily make it onto any respectable compilation of early Sixties' pop-rock, and stuff like 'Shag It' shows that, despite all the rumors, Spanish kids could get pretty rough in the latter days of Estado Español — certainly much rougher than their Soviet contemporaries on the other side of Europe.

