

THE MOODY BLUES



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1964-2017</i>	<i>Art Rock</i>	<i>Tuesday Afternoon (1967)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Moody Blues*

Years: *1964-1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

Page contents:

- [The Magnificent Moodies](#) (1965)



THE MAGNIFICENT MOODIES

Album released:

July 23, 1965

V A L U E
3 3 3 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) I'll Go Crazy; 2) Something You Got; 3) **Go Now!**; 4) Can't Nobody Love You; 5) I Don't Mind; 6) I've Got A Dream; 7) Let Me Go; 8) Stop; 9) Thank You Baby; 10) It Ain't Necessarily So; 11) True Story; 12) Bye Bye Bird; 13*) Steal Your Heart Away; 14*) Lose Your Money (But Don't Lose Your Mind); 15*) It's Easy Child; 16*) I Don't Want To Go On Living Without You; 17*) Time Is On My Side; 18*) **From The Bottom Of My Heart**; 19*) And My Baby's Gone; 20*) Everyday; 21*) You Don't (All The Time); 22*) This Is My House (But Nobody Calls); 23*) Life's Not Life; 24*) He Can Win; 25*) Boulevard De La Madeleine.

REVIEW

The original version of The Moody Blues, featuring Denny Laine on guitars and vocals and Clint Warwick on bass, has quite firmly gone down in history as just a minor footnote, distinguishable for one big (but rather «fluke») hit and little else of importance — for most people, The Moody Blues do not really begin until Justin Hayward and John Lodge join the band and help steer it in its classic-era art-rock direction. Those who *do* take their time to get acquainted with the original Moody Blues typically prefer to regard the two incarnations as different bands with totally different types of appeal — even despite the fact that the other three members (Mike Pinder, Ray Thomas, and Graeme Edge) were there from the very beginning, and their input had always mattered (though, admittedly, they were barely involved in the songwriting process in the Denny Laine era). Basically, Laine-era Moody Blues and Hayward-era Moody Blues attract different groups of fans who are not ever likely to reach some sort of mutual understanding.



Which is a pity, because, of course, if you take the past as a gradually shifting and evolving continuum rather than a random sequence of disconnected static states, there has never been *two* different Moody Blues just like there has never been two, or more, different Mississippi Rivers (up yours, Heraclitus). The difference between **The Magnificent Moodies** and **Days Of Future Passed** is as obvious and significant as it is between **A Hard Day's Night** and **Sgt. Pepper**, but there is also an obvious, logical, and somewhat fascinating-to-observe line of artistic evolution that connects the two — and the artistic visions of Denny Laine and Justin Hayward had a lot more in common than most people would be willing to admit, even if it wouldn't really take that much effort on their part to admit it.

One of Birmingham's finest sons, Brian Frederick Hines — better known as Denny Laine for tactical reasons — could hardly ever hope to become a big pop star on his own. His looks weren't too dashing, his voice wasn't too distinctive, his guitar-playing skills were passable, and his songwriting instincts took quite a long time to develop. But one thing that he did have was personality, and it actually becomes easier to discern it within his Moody Blues output if you go *backwards* in time, because the period during which it reached fruition would be around 1973–1978, as reflected in Denny's contributions for Paul McCartney & Wings. It's not an easy type of personality — it's a rather bitter view of the world, combining equal parts of somber melancholy, aching romanticism, and ironic cynicism, permeating all of his creativity (from 'No Words' on **Band On The Run** to my personal favorite, 'Deliver Your Children' on **London Town**), and acting as a surefire boner-killer when it comes to any sort of commercial or promotional perspectives. (Which didn't prevent Wings from achieving major commercial success — so, anyway, a double thanks to Paul for keeping Denny around for so long and letting him add his healthy spoon of vinegar to all those Wings records).

It is *that* same personality which was so instrumental in shaping the early sound of the aptly titled Moody Blues — so aptly titled, in fact, that one might argue the band name became a bit anachronistic after the 1967 shift in style. Of the two major «soul-tinged» rhythm'n'blues acts to spring up in 1964's Birmingham — The Moody Blues and The Spencer Davis Group — the Moodies were the less dynamic and energetic act, but there was an aura of something deep, dark, and uncomfortable around them, a sort of tragic vibe that few other UK acts bothered to cultivate at the time. The Animals might have had a bit of it, but Eric Burdon's personality was much rowdier and rougher-hewed than Denny's, who strived for a more refined, almost «aristocratic» effect. The closest analogy would probably be The Zombies, yet those guys were on the other side of the extreme — they were too quiet and too baroque, and they never ever felt properly at home with their trans-Atlantic R&B influences, quickly swayed by the seduction of the European art song instead.

Thus, The Moody Blues offered a sort of unique compromise which, like most compromises, ended up satisfying nobody, and the band spent almost three years on the road in a desperate search for their own niche. Throughout that time, Denny Laine was the leader of the group — or, at least, its most visible figure — but one must not overlook the role of Mike Pinder, whose piano and organ playing (no Mellotron yet!) was probably the most distinctive element of the Moodies' «moody» sound; or that of Ray Thomas, whose standing within the band was fairly unique at the time — a resident harmonica and flute player, who only occasionally sang lead vocals but whose presence, from the very beginning, lent a certain «pastoral» whiff to the proceedings. Pinder and Thomas were really the spice to give the band its own flavor, and that flavor would largely be retained unto their classic years.

Signed to one of Decca's subsidiary labels in the fall of 1964, for their first single The Moody Blues rather tellingly chose 'Steal Your Heart Away' — a relative oldie from 1961, recorded by Bobby Parker essentially as a rip-off of Ray Charles' 'I Believe To My Soul', only re-arranged as a blazing electric guitar number. The Moodies, instead of «conventionally» covering Ray himself (like The Animals did, for instance), whisk away the Bobby Parker number but end up re-arranging it back for keyboards — Denny couldn't ever play lead guitar worth shit, so the burden always falls on poor Pinder, who is hardly a virtuoso either, but has a knack for extracting genuine soul from his instrument all the same. The band manages to get a thick, bombastic sound going, and Denny demonstrates from the get-go that his voice is well suited for the plaintive, vulnerable side of soul... but the song itself is rather hard to take seriously just because it is such a blatant *and* obviously inferior re-write of 'I Believe To My Soul' that taking it on its own terms is strictly a no-no. It's definitely better than the B-side, though, a Laine-Pinder original called 'Lose Your Money' that sounds like a quickly tossed-together Jimmy Reed rip-off — the only redeeming thing about it is that Ray Thomas shows he can be a better Jimmy Reed-style harmonica player than Jimmy Reed himself. (But then again, so could Mick Jagger... yet could Mick Jagger play *the flute?*).

Fortune smiled upon the band the second time around — when they accidentally came across an obscure tune that almost seemed like it was written to fit their vibe, quite specifically so. Actually, 'Go Now' was written by the American R&B artist Larry Banks, on the heels of his separation from his wife Bessie — who, quite conveniently, ended up singing the demo version (cue Fleetwood Mac decorations!), which was later heard and appreciated by the Leiber and Stoller team, so they called Bessie Banks back into the studio and made a professional arrangement. The original version is definitely no slouch and [deserves to be appreciated](#): Bessie has a powerful tone and gives a strong, sincere, passionate reading that was, unfortunately, not enough to break her through on the national level. However, even if there's no evidence of his going through a similar break-up at the time, Denny, by his very tragic nature, rises up to the offered challenge — and the rest of

the band improves upon the original arrangement in just about every way it could be capable of improving. So when, a while later, Bessie Banks would complain that The Moody Blues' cover had blocked her chances of success merely because the American market was hot for British Invasion material and nothing else... well, not only is this factually wrong (the original version came out in January '64, when the Invasion hadn't even properly started yet), but there's a damn good musical reason for people preferring the British musical remake.

'Go Now' is far from the only good song recorded by the original Moody Blues — but it is certainly their quintessential opus, with the Laine-Pinder creative duo at its very best. Taking the song at a slightly faster tempo than the original (which means that they have enough time to throw in a piano solo that the original never had), Pinder becomes Pounder, churning out one of the most memorable keyboard chord sequences of 1964 — and his energy is closely matched by Graeme Edge, laying it thick on the bass drum as if he wanted each bar to be its own moment of culmination. Over the massive ruckus of the keys, drums, and group harmonies Denny wails like a 19th century romantic, devastated to the point of probably shooting himself once the song is over — but this theatricality actually works, as he adopts Bessie's rapid-fire semi-talking delivery and embellishes it with some more dazzling vocal flourishes (watch out for those "...I'm still in love with you now, *woah-oh-wow-wow...*" and "...can't you see I want you to stay, *yeah-ay-yay-yay...*"). It's Big, Sprawling, Phantasmagoric Drama in all its glory, and there was nobody on the British stage back in 1964 who'd do it so masterfully.

In pure theory, John Lennon might have done it, but John wouldn't want others to see him sprawled on the floor to such extent. This is the big difference between Bessie Banks and Denny: the original delivery has the wronged woman taking a stand, asserting her natural right to her feelings — for Laine's protagonist, the only thing that exists is the pointlessness of life after the separation. Both singers know exactly what they're after and nail it through sheer enthusiasm rather than trained professionalism and acrobatic over-emoting. But it's not really a fair fight, with Edge and Pinder latching onto Denny's intent and providing the appropriate heavy ammunition. I used to be worried about the song's messy production values; today, I cherish them as a perfect reflection of the turbulence inside the protagonist, so let Clint Warwick put that minimalistic bassline of his in as much overdrive as he wants to.

Curiously, Larry Banks' original collaborator on 'Go Now', Milton Bennett, also emerges as one of the songwriters on the B-side to the Moodies' single — 'It's Easy Child', a rather jovial and kiddishly repetitive R&B composition originally recorded by Sonny Thompson and His Orchestra, featuring Lula Reed on vocals and Freddie King on vocals and guitar back in 1962. Nothing could be more different in tempo, tone, and mood from 'Go Now', but apparently the band and its managers

thought that the record-buying public might be in need of a little relaxing antidote after the *Sturm-und-Drang* of the A-side. I like Pinder's honky-tonk piano and the group's well-disciplined doo-wop harmonies on this one, but the practice of making three-word choruses was annoying already back then and things haven't exactly changed ever since.

'Go Now' quickly became a sensation across both sides of the Atlantic, so that by early 1965 The Moody Blues could finally congratulate themselves on being admitted to the «core» of the British Invasion (even if they still didn't get to play over in the US until the very end of 1965, by which time their future was already quite dim). However, they themselves, so it seems, could not properly grasp the meaning of or the reasons for this success. To follow up 'Go Now', they chose 'I Don't Want To Go On Without You', a lightweight broken-hearted ballad recently recorded by The Drifters — a song that does indeed tackle the very same subject matter as 'Go Now', but does so in a comparatively mellow and maudlin way, and even if you like the song (for me, it's a bit corny), you gotta admit that there is no way for the band to improve on the original. Denny just sounds broken-hearted and whiny, without any chance to unleash a proper power attack; Pinder's piano merely provides accompaniment; and the rest of the band merely plod along. For the B-side, they unwisely chose 'Time Is On My Side' — unwisely, because that song had just been given the definitive treatment by the Stones, who'd turned it into a razor-sharp killer indictment, and next to that The Moody Blues truly end up sounding like «Denny And The Diplomats» (that was actually the name of Denny's first band, and it would fit this performance to a tee).

After the single predictably flopped (and I'm not sure it was even released in the US at all), the band took home a couple of valuable lessons — do not hope that a winning formula shall always yield sufficient returns, and do not rely too much on covering other people's material. With 1965 in full swing and original songwriting becoming a necessary condition for prolonged survival, the Moodies bounced back in May with 'From The Bottom Of My Heart (I Really Love You)', arguably one of the two or three most interesting and important songs in the Laine-era catalog. Co-written by Denny and Mike, it's a dark, echoey, somewhat haunting ballad with tiny shades of both Spanish and Indian motives (while the backing harmonies take an atmospheric cue from Gregorian chant); although the lyrics are generally quite trivial, the melody manages to set up an aura of creepy dark magic, with Denny sounding more and more like a man possessed until he really goes off his rocker in the coda, rising to an unsettling series of falsetto screams. The ending image is that of a poor man who's just imbibed some Satanic love potion, which, you gotta admit, makes for a pretty original approach to a love ballad for mid-1965. (On an off note, it also strongly, *very* strongly reminds me of the musical style of early Jefferson Airplane — and since this single definitely had an American release, there is nothing impossible about it being a potential influence).

With the single faring a little better on the charts than its predecessor (though still nowhere near the level of 'Go Now'), it was finally high time to think about a full-fledged LP. As was usual for the times, the album came in two varieties: the American version was predictably titled **Go Now** (and subtitled as **The Moody Blues #1**, just so that everybody who'd been living under a rock for the past half-year could count himself happily informed) and included all the A- and B-sides including 'From The Bottom Of My Heart'. Meanwhile, the UK version was very modestly titled **The Magnificent Moodies** and included fewer singles and more previously unreleased studio material.

Despite the understanding of the vitality of original songwriting, Laine and Pinder were still unable to supply an entire LP's worth of fresh compositions. Their valiant struggle did produce at least four more, though, all of them piled up close together on the second side of the album — and all are rather disappointing, nowhere near close to the level of feeling and inventiveness displayed on 'From The Bottom Of My Heart'. 'True Story', for instance, is an attempt to hybridize the Bo Diddley beat with the currently-en-vogue folk-pop vibe, but while the transition back-and-forth is pretty smooth, the cumulative effect is negligible. 'Let Me Go' is a rather feeble take on the torch ballad, the best thing about which is probably Ray Thomas' well-noticeable flute accompaniment throughout — a nice precursor to the occasional «pastoral vibe» of the classic Moody Blues era. The less said about the wannabe-Smokey Robinson falsetto chorus of 'Thank You Baby', the better; and 'Stop' features some interesting time signature changes, but they seem to be so over their heads with the idea that they end up repeating the chorus a million times and running the gag into the ground very quickly.

Thus it's back to covers again, a few of which are actually more impressive than the originals. Nobody in their right minds would ever prefer Moody Blues covers of James Brown to the originals, *but* I have to say that, at the very least, the Mike Pinder-sung cover of 'I Don't Mind' is vastly superior to the Who's version from the same year; Pinder's piano playing and his more carefully thought out vocal delivery gives the tune a stately, chivalrous feel, meaning that the Moodies are trying to adapt Brown's soul prayer to a different cultural setting, where the Who were more keen on just trying to emulate Brown's original message and feel with their usual musical means. Sonny Boy Williamson's 'Bye Bye Bird' features surprisingly ferocious jamming (proving that the Moodies could seriously compete with the Yardbirds when it came to bluesy rave-ups); and Ray Thomas gives a damn fine reading of Gershwin's 'It Ain't Necessarily So' — given that his voice has always reminded me of a friendly, easy-going university professor, he sounds here like a charismatic lecturer on scientific atheism. Had the singing been in Russian, the song might have been a big success on Soviet TV circa 1965 (although it was more customary to avoid Biblical topics altogether rather than publicly denigrate them, so probably not).

On the whole, the LP is obviously a big disappointment: it does not capitalize on the promises of either 'Go Now' or 'From The Bottom Of My Heart', it blows up our trust in Laine and Pinder as a songwriting duo capable of rising to the heights of Lennon-McCartney or Jagger-Richards, and it shows that, for all of the talent involved, the band is drastically unable to use it to good effect. (Thomas, Pinder, and Edge, in particular, are all but criminally underused.) Yet, on the other hand, it hardly deserves the ice-cold shoulder so often presented to it by Hayward-era fans; few of the songs are truly cringeworthy, and Denny's bitter-romantic personality saves a lot of them from bland mediocrity by offering them a seat on the, let's say, «charismatic mediocrity» bench instead. It's a half-decent first effort that could, under more auspicious circumstances, perhaps be followed by a much stronger sophomore release.

Alas, the fates had decreed that the rest of the Denny Laine era — which, after the release of the LP, lasted for slightly more than one year — would be restricted to a small bunch of singles. Since there were only three of them, and they are very often appended as bonus tracks to CD editions of **The Magnificent Moodies**, they clearly deserve to be mentioned here — not to mention that they actually display quite a bit of creative growth. First, there's 'Everyday' from late 1965; a somewhat clumsy imitation of the Beatles (the group harmonies in particular take a cue from Lennon-McCartney), it is a respectable failure to find their own melodic path through a well-trodden formula. Meanwhile, the B-side 'You Don't (All The Time)' is more of a tribute to the freshly nascent bouncy piano-pop style of the Kinks (Denny sounds hilariously close to Dave Davies at times), although Ray adds a distinctive touch with his strategically placed flute counterpoints.

Both of the other two singles were released by Decca already after Laine's departure — too bad, because at least the first of these shows that the Laine-led Moody Blues *were* finally on the way of getting somewhere. 'Boulevard De La Madeleine', replete with the clichéd, but still atmospheric French accordeon, is a plaintive artsy serenade that somehow manages to sound a little English, a little French, and a little Spanish at the same time. Not a great song by any means, but quite a great songwriting leap for the team here, and if you cut out the instrumental section in the middle, with Ray's oddly distorted French horn blaring from somewhere high up in the skies, you could have easily slipped it inside some Hayward-era classic tune and nobody would bat an eye.

Even catchier is the fast-paced desperate pop-rocker 'This Is My House (But Nobody Calls)', also a bit reminiscent of the Kinks but really dominated by Laine's own whiny vibe. The distinctive high-pitched "owwww, owww" vocal harmonies may feel a bit hicky, but they do a good job of registering the song in your mind — and helping turn it into the single most anguished performance in Moody Blues Mark I's history. The twin impact of both sides is quite strong, and the only reason

that I can think of for why it flopped so miserably is probably the same reason why all those Zombies singles from the 1965–67 era used to flop as well: they simply felt too miserable and self-pitying for an era that thrived on musical optimism. It's not for nothing, after all, that the Beatles did not release songs like 'Eleanor Rigby' as singles. (Okay, so they *did* release it as a B-side — but the A-side was 'Yellow Submarine', 'nuff said).

The last of the Laine-era singles, released already in early 1967, was 'Life's Not Life', another exercise in wallowing-in-misery with a modestly catchy chorus, some quirky tempo changes, and a bit of Ray's pastoral flute for good measure; the B-side, 'He Can Win', again sounds like a Kinks outtake with Dave Davies' evil twin on vocals and would probably be a solid filler number on any LP, but does not feel quite so hot when it requires 50% of your attention. Yet both are decent and perfectly listenable «mope-pop» recordings in their own rights.

Note that those two singles do not really reflect any natural progression; all four songs were actually recorded during a single session on September 8, 1966, with Decca executives saving all that stuff and cutting it up into small slices for later releases. In fact, the Moodies spent most of the summer of 1966 cutting material for a potential second LP that ultimately never materialized; produced by Denny Cordell, the results of these sessions are now collectively available on the second CD of a special deluxe edition of **The Magnificent Moodies** on Esoteric Records — not that there's a huge lot of amazing discoveries to be made, but the more of that stuff you get to hear, the less you will probably want to think of Laine-era and Hayward-era Moody Blues as two different bands that have nothing to do with each other. (Here's a cover of Tim Hardin's '[How Can We Hang On To A Dream?](#)', for instance — those harmonies are totally classic Moody Blues harmonies).

It is still not entirely clear why Laine quit the band; by his own admission, he just «wanted to do something new», but it's pretty hard to imagine that he thought his bandmates were stifling his creative freedom. Perhaps the lack of commercial success simply got to him in the end, or maybe one night on tour he heard Graeme Edge mumble "*cold hearted orb that rules the night*" in his sleep and it was, like, «*okay, I'm outta here before I go nuts, too*». In any case, he left behind a respectable body of second-rate work which is well worth exploring for people with a historic mindset, and well worth empathizing with for people with broken-hearted propensities. A footnote, perhaps, but a wise person never disregards an informative footnote — in science, at least, it is often more valuable than the main text.

