

THE VENTURES



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1960-2022</i>	<i>Pop rock</i>	<i><u>Walk, Don't Run</u> (1960)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Ventures*

Years: *1960-1962*

George Starostin's Reviews

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WALK DON'T RUN

Album released: **V** **A** **L** **U** **E**
December 1960 **2** **4** **3** **3** **3**

More info:



Tracks: 1) Morgen; 2) Raunchy; 3) Home; 4) My Own True Love (Tara's Theme); 5) The Switch; 6) **Walk, Don't Run**; 7) Night Train; 8) No Trespassing; 9) Caravan; 10) Sleep Walk; 11) The McCoy; 12) Honky Tonk.

REVIEW

In the beginning, way back in 1928, there was *New Moon*, an operetta by Sigmund Romberg, whose most enduring aria was '[Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise](#)', which went on to become a bit of a jazz standard, performed (e.g. by Artie Shaw) or deconstructed (e.g. by Coltrane or Eric Dolphy) in miriads of your well-known jazz ways. Catchy, but corny, in 1954 the composition served as a contrafact inspiration for virtuoso jazz guitarist Johnny Smith, who used the harmonies to write and record '[Walk, Don't Run!](#)', a short and moody instrumental with a memorable melancholic main theme, lovingly caressed on the electric guitar with a bit of a Spanish feel (apparently using what is generally known as the «Andalusian cadence»).

Relatively few people cared about Johnny Smith, though, outside of fellow guitarists — such as Chet Atkins, who fell in love with the tune and made [his own acoustic recording](#) for the album **Hi-Fi In Focus** in 1957. In his arrangement, the tune took on a slightly more folksy flavor, or, perhaps, a slightly more gypsy one? may be faint echoes of Django Reinhardt in there... anyway, the important thing is that many more people at the time probably listened to Chet Atkins than to Johnny Smith, and among those people were a couple of young guitarists from Tacoma, Washington — more precisely, Bob Bogle,



who owned the record, and his recent friends Don Wilson and Nokie Edwards, with whom he'd only just formed a band they originally wanted to call The Versatones, but settled on the humbler-sounding Ventures when they learned the former name was already taken by competitors. And this is where our story properly begins.

It is interesting that the general concept of an «instrumental rock band» is one of the few concepts of the pre-Beatles era where the UK may actually hold precedence over the US. By the time The Ventures appeared on the scene, The Shadows had already made a big name for themselves with 'Apache' and established an artistic reputation independent of being merely the backing band for Cliff Richard. Meanwhile, over across the Atlantic the concept of «instrumental rock» was rather epitomized by solo artists such as Duane Eddy — or bands that had a mix of vocal and instrumental numbers, such as New Mexico's The Fireballs (whose '[Torquay](#)' is an important, if not particularly impressive, stepping stone in the development of instrumental rock and roll, but who actually had their own lead vocalist as well — singing pleasant, but somewhat lukewarm Buddy Holly-esque ditties like '[I Don't Know](#)').

Everything changed overnight when The Ventures finally managed to get 'Walk, Don't Run' on the air — which took a bit of an effort, since no record label wanted to sign them up at first and so they had to set up their own one (New Horizon). For the record, the band's first recording on that label was not 'Walk, Don't Run', but rather '[Cookies & Coke](#)', a *vocal* number (ha ha!) co-written by Bogle and Wilson that sounds absolutely primitive, more like a bunch of hillbillies around the campfire than anything even remotely resembling America's tightest and most professional instrumental rock band — which, at that point, they had absolutely no intention of becoming; but with the unexpected smash success of 'Walk, Don't Run', which eventually made it all the way to #2 on the charts, The Ventures' fate was decided beyond their will.

As it often happens, it is difficult today to fully realize the impact of 'Walk, Don't Run' because such a great deal of rock and roll recorded *after* it — not least by The Ventures themselves, but also by miriads of other artists, including about 90% of the entire «surf-rock» movement — would sound so much like it. But was there anything that sounded *that* much like it *before* the song was released? Nope, not really. As I relisten to stuff that had already been en vogue, everything from Duane Eddy to The (Fabulous) Wailers and beyond, I fail to find an opening that would be as rhythmic, powerful, and at the same time sonically feather-light as Skip Moore's cymbal-heavy drum fills and the rhythm-lead duo of Wilson and Bogle, as the latter reprises Chet Atkins' memorable melancholic lead while the former pins it to a formerly non-present, subtly Latin-flavored rhythm part that we're all probably sure we heard a million times before but not so sure we heard it on any song *earlier* than 'Walk, Don't Run'...

...anyway, enough with the attempts to write pseudo-objective musicological history: 'Walk, Don't Run', as performed by The Ventures, is simply a great rocking instrumental that takes the faint touch of nostalgic melancholy from Johnny Smith and Chet Atkins and counterbalances it with driving, irresistible rhythmic — this is no longer your suicidal loner sitting and moping on top of some remote hillock, this is your suicidal loner getting on his suicidal bike and propelling his lonely ass along the lonely highway, because there's nothing like a wild ride that can chase away one's moodiness... or, at least, properly convert that moodiness to something orgasmic in nature. In all honesty, The Ventures should have retitled their version 'Run, Don't Walk', as there would be no better verbal way to express the difference of their interpretation from the earlier arrangements by Johnny and Chet.

It is useless to argue which of the three versions is the best one — they all serve such different purposes. In comparison to Wilson, Bogle, and Edwards, Smith and Atkins were seasoned guitar pros, and their playing reveals far more depth and technicality; but clearly, only The Ventures here came close to creating an entire new musical genre — and immediately found themselves trapped by its success. Not that 'Walk Don't Run' really became the proverbial stone around their neck; given the guys' lack of natural talent for either singing or songwriting, they seemed to be fairly happy with becoming rock music's leading «instrumental band», embarking on a long and adventurous path of covering other people's material and letting their guitars do all the talking. In the process, however, The Ventures really became «The Shadows» — a band that kept a sharp eye on the trends and fads of contemporary pop music and regularly offered their own instrumental projections of other people's hits, almost karaoke-style.

In this way, following The Ventures' impressive LP discography is in itself a fascinating journey — by listening to all of their albums (at least all through the 1960s) in chronological order, it's as if the entire history of the decade's rock and pop music is gradually unveiling before your eyes, albeit with a heavy emphasis on the Billboard charts, of course. The bad news is that this quickly turns into a routine process, and, in fact, they would never again get to catch the public eye as efficiently as they did with 'Walk Don't Run' (the closest they came was in 1964, when they once again hit the Top 10 with... the *remake* of 'Walk Don't Run'!). The good news is that there are much worse routine processes that I can think of: while you always knew more or less what to expect from The Ventures, you could also expect it to be consistently fun and tasteful.

Thus, for their first album, quickly recorded at a home studio in Seattle after 'Walk Don't Run' became shooting up the charts, The Ventures (with Howie Johnson replacing Skip Moore on drums) chose to cover such contemporary material as 'Morgen', the big recent international hit for the Croatian artist Ivo Robić (the [original](#) is a good choice for all the fans of

German language delivered in funny Slavic accents, but I'm taking Bob Bogle's guitar lead over Ivo's vocal lead any time of the week); and 'Raunchy', the [famous instrumental hit by Bill Justis](#) that would land a young George Harrison employment with The Quarrymen — The Ventures might here be offering the definitive version of the tune, with perfectly dedicated interplay between all the four members; Nokie Edwards switches to lead guitar for this one, with Bogle laying down the simple, but powerful boogie bass line, yet ultimately, the effect is very cumulative, with each of the four musicians playing an equally important role in getting you up from your seat and down in your imaginary race car on Highway 61.

On the more romantic side of the equation, the band covers 'Sleep Walk', the beautiful steel guitar masterpiece that had only recently brought fame to [Santo & Johnny](#); since the Ventures did not have a steel guitar player, a large part of the magic of the original is unfortunately gone — but they compensate for this with much tighter rhythm guitar and an overall smoother, more perfectly flowing twangy lead tone. It's also a good occasion to compare the style of the Ventures to that of the Shadows, who would also [cover the song](#) next year: the Shadows play it a little slower, and Hank Marvin makes an effort to preserve the «otherworldliness» of the original by equipping his guitar with a reverb effect and tuning it to a downright angelic pitch — whereas Bob Bogle puts his faith in the «twanginess», giving the whole thing a much more Hawaiian, surfy angle. Ultimately, the Shadows take you to fairy dreamland, while the Ventures take you to a sunny beach — so much for cultural differences between the US and the UK circa 1960-61.

Mixed in with the recent hits are covers of some classic oldies: Bill Doggett's 'Honky Tonk' from 1956 was already perceived as one of the first proverbial «instrumental rock» numbers, so it was only natural for the Ventures to add their own twist to this slow shuffle (it's a bit draggy for my tastes, though), and 'Caravan'... well, what sort of an instrumental band does not have 'Caravan' in their repertoire? (In their defense, I really love those little extra «buzzing bee» runs that Bogle throws in during his second run through the main theme — they're quite hilarious!). There's also 'Night Train', which everybody was doing at the time — still a long way away from the explosive interpretation of James Brown, but already faster, tighter, and punchier than the old school Jimmy Forrest original from 1952.

The band's original songwriting is mostly confined to a small group of fast, rocking numbers that are not very inventive (thus, 'No Trespassing' is clearly just a riff on Duane Eddy's 'Moovin' 'n' Groovin', with a bit of 'Rhapsody In Blue' briefly quoted inside for good measure), but serve their limited purpose full well. By the way, I think that 'The Switch' might actually refer to the fact that for this recording, too, Bogle and Edwards switch their lead and bass parts, even if drummer Howie Johnson is still the true hero of the song; that fast, precise, and infuriatingly hyper-active style of drumming was

actually far less spread with American rock and pop artists around 1960 than we'd commonly like to think — I know Levon Helm was a big adept on his earliest records with Ronnie Hawkins, but overall, drummers tended to exercise a bit more restraint, which puts Howie in a class of his own. (Too bad that class would only last up to 1962, when Howie would be permanently put out of the overdriven drumming business after a serious spinal injury).

On the whole, though, the overall quality of **Walk, Don't Run** does not properly manifest itself these days before you place it in the general context of 1960 and realize that *nobody* for miles and miles around was combining tightness, energy, and fun on the same level with these four rebel-rousers from Tacoma. No, they weren't about danger, aggression, titillation, or provocativeness — but neither were they about distilling the essence of rock'n'roll to the lowest common denominator. More than anything else, The Ventures were a *band*, perhaps one of the first true examples of a tightly coordinated rock band where the whole matters more than the individual players and the individual players are 100% bent on polishing their individual strengths to lend them to the collective purpose. In other words, they were doing for rock music more or less the same that James Brown and The Furious Flames were doing for R&B — that is, bringing it out of its «rambunctious teenage phase» to a state of respectable maturity, while at the same time taking care to preserve the inner child. And in some respects at least, that state remains as perfectly enjoyable today as it was more than sixty years ago.

P.S.: The one thing that remains most dated about the album is its oddly mismatched cover — as was common back in the day, Dolton Records occupied most of the sleeve with the alluring figure of a model (Barbara Grimes) so as to make horny teenagers part with their money even quicker than usual, but since the band themselves were on tour at the time, they had to use a bunch of stockroom workers to take their place in the background. And would The Ventures themselves ever stoop to breaking their concentration and falling all over their instruments like dolts at the first sight of a sexy chick in high heels? Nah. At the very least, this is not what the actual music on the album suggests.

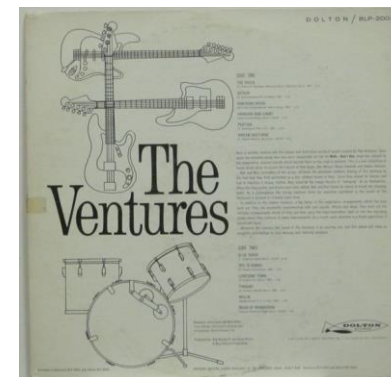




THE VENTURES

Album released: **V** **A** **L** **U** **E**
February 4, 1961 **2** **4** **3** **2** **3**

More info:



Tracks: 1) The Shuck; 2) Detour; 3) Ram-Bunk-Shush; 4) Hawaiian War Chant; 5) Perfidia; 6) **Harlem Nocturne**; 7) Blue Tango; 8) Ups 'N Downs; 9) Lonesome Town; 10) Torquay; 11) Wailin'; 12) Moon Of Manakoora.

REVIEW

The only possible way to write more or less meaningful reviews of the Ventures' output, which is almost as vast as the universe itself (and, at a certain period in time, seems to have been expanding at comparable rates), is not to ask what The Ventures can do for their country, but what their country can do for The Ventures; in other words, look at each album as capturing a certain state of mind, relevant for a certain particular period, and see the band as a group of musical priests celebrating that state of mind. The Ventures were not — and never pretended to be — deep and inventive enough to uncover new emotional levels or hitherto hidden meanings in the songs they performed. But, as a rule, they were intelligent enough to understand their *actual* meanings, and translate them to their own instrumental language in the most accessible of all possible ways.

In late 1960, that instrumental language still mainly represented an early form of surf-rock, so it is hardly surprising that when their eye fell on 'Perfidia', the old Spanish hit for Xavier Cougat in 1940, they arranged the song as a fast, rocking, danceable number. Why they chose to take 'Perfidia', I don't know, but the song was very much in the public eye — at least, in the Latin public eye — ever since the first recorded versions, and even Nat King Cole had recorded a Spanish-sung



version in 1959, so maybe that helped trigger the band's interest. The funny thing is that, even if the Ventures faithfully preserve the main musical theme of [the original hit](#), the *rhythm* of the song directly repeats that of 'Walk Don't Run' (for the first 6-7 seconds, you could swear it was just a re-recording in a different key) — which helps reconstruct the original motivation as something like «well, we have just successfully converted jazz into surf-rock; shouldn't the next move be to do the same for Latin music?». And it works, because by speeding up the tempo and replacing the boring old-school violins with the exciting and fashionable twang guitar they turn the song into a potential anthem for young lovers (well, young ex-lovers, given the song's theme, but since there are no lyrics anyway, who cares if the song is really about treachery?).

Still, lightning does not strike twice if you try luring it to the exact same place, and 'Perfidia' only managed to hit #15 on the Billboard charts (and even that, I would think, was rather surprisingly high — just going to show the true strength of the momentum of 'Walk, Don't Run'). Not wanting to fall into the same trap for the third time, the band then switched gears for its next single and chose a semi-obscure blues shuffle: 'Ram-Bunk-Shush' was originally recorded by Lucky Millinder in 1952, then became a [decent R&B hit](#) for Bill Doggett in 1957, which is clearly the version that the Ventures are emulating, replacing the «gargling» sax of Doggett's version for a relatively countrified electric lead. From a technical standpoint, the performance is all but flawless, but a tad too mechanical and predictable — a bit like «The Ventures are passing their Blues 101 exam with flying colors». The single only reached #29 this time, and not until three years later would the band be able to once again break into the Top 50.

That said, in late 1960 and early 1961 The Ventures were still perceived as a fresh and hot presence, rather than the «Silent Guardians Of The Charts» into whom they would soon evolve, and their second LP, which they decided to simply title **The Ventures**, still has plenty of youthful excitement to go along with the professionalism. Both 'Perfidia' and 'Ram-Bunk-Shush' are here, but, to my mind, they are not the obvious highlights. On the fast-and-exciting front, I would rather award that honor to 'Detour', shorter than Duane Eddy's instrumental by about forty seconds but tightening it up to much higher intensity. Eddy's version was primarily a demonstration of his own twangy genius, but *this* 'Detour' is most definitely a band effort, with rhythm, lead, bass, and drums locking together in eighty absolutely explosive seconds. And even they don't have Eddy's guitar-vs.-sax advantage, the lead guitar part here compensates fully by getting more and more excited as the song goes on, rising in pitch, throwing in extra eighth-notes to fill up the entire space, and creating the illusion of constant acceleration even if the song's tempo never really changes. Pretty kick-ass for early 1961.

Another good show of taste is the cover of 'Wailin' by The Wailers — symbolically, this had been the band's first single to

not hit the charts, so The Ventures' selection of it rather than 'Tall Cool One' or 'Mau-Mau' (both of which *did* chart in 1959) can be seen as a special gesture of appreciation. More likely, though, they just took the fastest and most overtly rock'n'roll number from the band that they could find — and although the Wailers' original is predictably a little dirtier, sloppier, and greasier than the Ventures' tight-as-heck version, far be it from me to complain that it does not rock every bit as tough. I mean, come on, it is no crime to admit that the Ventures have a sharper developed sense of rhythm than the Wailers ever had (just listen to that opening lick on [the original](#) — they already lose the rhythm in the first two seconds of the song), and that's a kind of discipline that is not just there for purely Apollonic purposes, you know.

As for the slower, moodier numbers, the obvious stand-out here is 'Harlem Nocturne', which the band adapted from the [recent hit](#) by the Viscounts, a short-lived band from New Jersey that never managed to repeat its original success. Again, you can feel the Ventures' power when they take the Viscounts' idea — turn the old jazz ballad into something that would remind you of a slightly more sinister vision of «Harlem at night» — and sharpen its fuzziness with stronger, tighter rhythm work, replacing the somewhat «gloppy» bass playing of the Viscounts with metronomically punctuated notes and removing the excessive tremolo effect from the lead guitar, making it woo you rather through the actual notes played than the special effects administered (always a worthy cause when we're talking professionalism vs. amateurishness). The result is a pretty haunting combination of impending danger and subtle melancholia-cum-wistfulness.

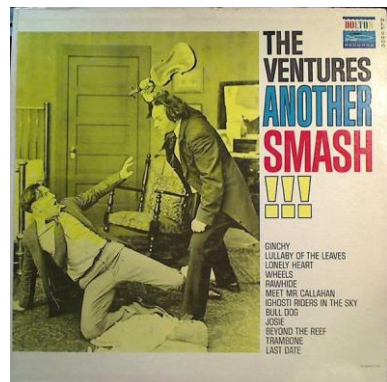
Of the relatively recent hits, the Ventures also turn their attention to 'Torquay' by [The Fireballs](#), a nice reminder of the existence of this once-fine New Mexican rock band (that is, before they turned into more of a novelty act with 'Sugar Shack' in 1963), though they don't do a whole lot of magic with the song this time around. However, on the sentimental side they perfectly bottle the existentialist sadness of Ricky Nelson's 'Lonesome Town', which always felt like much more than «just» a breakup song for me anyway. I am not sure why they also chose to cover such oldies as 'Hawaiian War Chant', 'Blue Tango', and 'Moon Of Manakoora' (perhaps somebody of note covered those in 1959-60, I just couldn't be bothered to rummage through the chart records for *all* those tunes), but they all sound nice anyway — particularly 'Moon Of Manakoora', a song that usually qualifies as a piece of predictable «Hawaiian exotica», but whose magic qualities they somehow manage to enhance without summoning visions of grass skirts and luaus.

To those who might have harbored any illusions, based on **Walk Don't Run**, that The Ventures would turn their gift into original songwriting and general musical innovation, **The Ventures** would be a disappointment — with not a single attempt at writing their own melodies and no particularly new sounds to surprise and astound us, it should have been clear

that the band settled into a comfortable formula that would probably dominate their life from now on, regardless of whether it turns out to be commercially viable or not. But now that we firmly know what to expect of The Ventures, that formula is pretty sensible. The Ventures are perfectionists — they seek out tunes whose full potential, as it seems to them, has not been explored, and polish them up. In later years, when they'd start turning to the Beatles and Cream, this would not work so well; with songs like 'Detour' and 'Harlem Nocturne', it works like a charm.

The down side is that most of the existing Ventures compilations are utterly useless — the probability of a «deep cut» on a Ventures LP kicking just as much ass as a Ventures' not-very-hit single is pretty high, and your best bet for a perfect Ventures compilation is to just get all the albums (I think there's only about two hundred and fifty of them, so not a big deal, really) and whittle them down to whatever gets your native goat. But I do like to pay attention to all that «filler» as well, if only for the sake of following this «musical calendar» that they kept updating for most of the Sixties and even beyond that (though after about 1970, their sense of time becomes far blurrier).





ANOTHER SMASH!!!

Album released:

June 26, 1961

V A L U E

2 3 3 2 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) (Ghost) Riders In The Sky; 2) Wheels; 3) Lonely Heart; 4) **Bulldog**; 5) Lullaby Of The Leaves; 6) Beyond The Reef; 7) **Raw-Hide**; 8) Meet Mister Callahan; 9) Trambone; 10) Last Date; 11) Ginchy; 12) Josie.

REVIEW

I am unable to find where that punny front cover photo comes from — by the looks of it, it may be a still taken from some old silent movie, but since The Ventures aren't The Beatles or even The Beach Boys, information is understandably scarce here. In any case, the original sleeve was quickly retired (were they breaking copyright laws?) and replaced by a much less interesting cover with a «shadow man» depicted instead. That way, the title became even *more* meaningless, since, by any possible accounts, **Another Smash!!!** was anything but a «smash» for the band. The album did chart higher than its self-titled predecessor, but they could have hardly known it upon naming it, and the accompanying single, a cover of the old jazz standard 'Lullaby Of The Leaves', was their lowest charting single to date. Still... extra points for confidence?

Anyway, not all that much had changed in the musical world in between February and June of 1961, so **Another Smash!!!** is not too thematically different from **The Ventures**. The band still retains the principle of mostly choosing instrumental originals as the basis for their instrumental covers, and still preserves a certain ratio of recent hits to relative oldies. The single is actually classified as the latter: although 'Lullaby Of The Leaves' was recorded by just about anybody in the jazz business, The Ventures base their cover on a [1957 reinvention by Chet Atkins](#) — perhaps with a faint hope that, just as it was with 'Walk Don't Run', Chet might once again serve as their lucky rabbit's foot. Amusingly, you can observe in comparing the two versions that they actually made theirs sound even more similar to 'Walk Don't Run' — by using the exact same drum fills and guitar riff in the introduction. It's a somewhat cheesy self-plagiarizing trick that, as the charts clearly show,

very rarely led anybody to improved commercial success, but the recording still works as a slightly more complex and slightly more rocking variation on 'Walk Don't Run', even if it has to expurgate all the remaining jazz echoes (still clearly audible in the Chet Atkins version) to do so.

Of the more recent hits, The Ventures mainly tackle the surfy-twangy instrumental ones. The album opens with '(Ghost) Riders In The Sky', one of the oldest and most famous «mystical western» classics that had only recently received a modern instrumental reading from [The Ramrods](#); omitting all of the extra-musical overdubs (swinging whips, yee-haws, mooing cows, etc.) as useless baggage, the band replaces the Ramrods' guerrilla-style messiness and chaos with Prussian army-style discipline, making the imaginary onslaught of the «Wild Hunt» even more coldly terrifying to the contemporary listener (and if you strain your imagination a bit yourself, it might even feel coldly terrifying to you today). Then, for spiritual contrast, this is immediately followed by 'Wheels', the cover of a recent hit by [The String-A-Longs](#), but this is where The Ventures lose: the tune's lightweight, catchy atmosphere works much better with the original's odd, somewhat «gurgly» guitar tone and Tex-Mex percussive rhythmic, and «venturizing» the original arrangement removes that charm.

Likewise, one cover version that I absolutely do not care to hear ever again is Link Wray's 'Raw-Hide'. [The original](#), as I have indicated in the corresponding Link Wray review, is easily my favorite Link tune from the early days — that snarling guitar tone *really* kicks ass, or, more accurately, tears ass to shreds — and all The Ventures are able to offer is a pale, starving shadow; they can subdue and discipline another person's tune like few others can, but what can they do when the tune is *already* disciplined to perfection, and still manages to be violent and aggressive at the same time? The Ventures are not a violent band; subtly menacing they can be when the song demands it, but they were never «young punks» like Link, and there is no purpose whatsoever to the «venturizing» of the Link Wray sound.

On the other hand, covering a second-rate surf-rock band like The Fireballs is a completely different business — take their original version of '[Bulldog](#)' and it sounds like a tentative demo next to The Ventures' tight-as-heck reinterpretation. I am not saying that The Ventures' sound is objectively superior: it is objectively better produced, but, clearly, there is an edgy rawness to the thin, crispy-dry, echoey riffage of The Fireballs (inherited from the likes of Johnny Kidd & The Pirates) that is more «rock and roll» than The Ventures could ever hope to be. Yet here at least, it is easy to understand why The Ventures would want to cover the song and to enjoy all the extra polish, starting with Howie Johnson's beautiful drum patterns and ending with Bogle's rich ringing overtones on the lead guitar part.

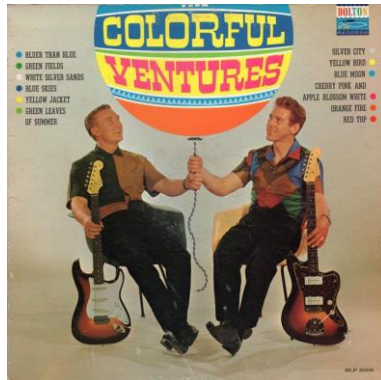
The rest of the covers are generally less memorable, but still consistently enjoyable. These include: (a) a rendition of British

composer Eric Spear's theme for the movie *Meet Mr. Callaghan*, probably best known in the States for the weird-as-usual [Les Paul rearrangement](#) (on which he makes his guitar sound like a harpsichord, which automatically makes the older version more interesting than the Ventures cover); (b) 'Ginchy', a rather perfunctory reproduction of the [Bert Weedon original](#) — it is, however, curious to note how intensely the Ventures were studying the UK musical scene even in those pre-British Invasion days; (c) 'Trambone', yet another [Chet Atkins cover](#) which, in my opinion, sounds far more delicious when done by Chet in his trademark finger-thumb-picking style; (d) a guitar reinvention of Floyd Cramer's piano instrumental '[Last Date](#)' which is at least intriguing, though both versions are just «pleasant» rather than «moving».

Original compositions by Bogle and Wilson are limited to just two numbers, both of them fairly romantic this time: the faster-paced 'Lonely Heart' is a twangy-country ballad with some nice guitar jangle and some corny old-time Western harmonies, and the slower-paced 'Josie' is heavily orchestrated, heavily similar to 'Can't Help Falling In Love' (though this is probably a coincidence, since the Elvis song was not yet released at the time), and, overall, not the greatest finale to a Ventures album I could think about. The fewer vocals and strings there are on a Ventures album, the better it is, anyway, unless those vocals and strings are used in a weird, spooky fashion like they are on '(Ghost) Riders In The Sky'.

On the whole, **Another Smash!!!** is probably the weakest — if still nice — album of the Ventures' «original trilogy», continuing to stick to the same principles of material selection and sequencing but with steadily diminishing returns. The number of misfires — such as making the obvious mistake of trying to adapt Link Wray, or the embarrassing attempt to merge 'Lullaby Of The Leaves' with 'Walk Don't Run' — is significantly higher, and the number of high points is significantly lower (I'd say that only 'Bulldog' is an unquestionable improvement on the original). For all of the band's professionalism, enthusiasm, and lack of pop star ambitiousness, it was probably time for a bit of a change, although few people could have predicted the actual strange direction in which they'd take it on their next LP...





THE COLORFUL VENTURES

Album released:

October 2, 1961

V A L U E
3 3 3 2 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) Blue Moon; 2) Yellow Jacket; 3) Bluer Than Blue; 4) Cherry Pink And Apple Blossom White; 5) Green Leaves Of Summer; 6) Blue Skies; 7) Greenfields; 8) Red Top; 9) White Silver Sands; 10) Yellow Bird; 11) Orange Fire; 12) **Silver City**.

REVIEW

In 1961, Hank Levine (what a brilliant, 100%-American name-surname combination!) was a little-known composer and arranger, whose principal achievements to date was his work on records by such acts as Dorsey Burnette and The Fleetwoods (he is responsible for the soft-as-silk production on their famous ‘[Tragedy](#)’, even if I still prefer the Brenda Lee cover). The Fleetwoods became his clients because he’d signed up to work for their label, Dolton Records, and so it was only a matter of time before he’d also cross paths with The Ventures — and from that crossing came ‘(Theme From) Silver City’, a minor hit for the band in August 1961 and easily the best song on this subsequent LP.

You could probably guess that there never had been a movie or show like ‘Silver City’... and you’d be wrong! There *was* a Western movie called *Silver City* back in 1951, and it even had [an opening theme](#) (credited to Paul Sawtell) that had a few phrases vaguely reminiscent of Levine’s composition — so it’s hardly a total coincidence, though it would be hard to accuse Mr. Levine of copyright infringement; ‘(Theme From) Silver City’ clearly finds more inspiration in the general Western style than specifically rips anybody off. Not that this is really so important; what *is* important is that the lead guitar melody is catchy, juicy, and uplifting in a way that only The Ventures, with their perfect understanding of the importance of guitar tone, could provide back in 1961. And Levine actually does a great job embellishing the band’s tight performance with strings (note how they begin to stealthily creep in around the second verse, propping up the already established «*are-you-ready-to-take-on-this-world?*» mood) and horns — there’s a genuinely epic moment here at 0:52 when the horns take over

the main theme, and then the guitar *and* strings respond to the horns as if they were all members of the same bunch of merry cowboys, scattered around the hilltops but in tight coordination with each other. (The tune, by the way, is *meant* to be played in stereo — one of those cases where a monaural version pretty much loses the purpose). I think Lee Hazlewood and Duane Eddy might have been biting their nails over this one!

The B-side to the single, perhaps accidentally, perhaps not, also happened to share a color term — ‘Bluer Than Blue’ was credited to Dolton Records’ general manager Dick Glasser and to Tommy Allsup, lead guitar player for The Crickets; indeed, the lead guitar melody has some very typically Buddy Hollyesque pop inflections that you will easily recognize, even if, on the whole, the tune is quite retiring next to the smashing cowboy pomp of ‘Silver City’. But more importantly, this funny combination of «silver» and «blue» on the same single probably led to the idea of recording an entire LP of songs featuring names for colors in their titles — and thus, to the birth of the famous «Ventures Concept Album» franchise, where, instead of randomly writing and covering songs on different topics, they would group them together on a thematic basis (or, at least, on a pseudo-thematic one, as song titles — particularly if the songs are instrumentals — certainly do not always have a one-to-one correlation with song moods and meanings).

This quasi-conceptual approach had its ups and downs, like most creative ideas do. On one hand, it somehow elevated the status of The Ventures — instead of pure rambling around, they could now arrange their albums as connected «suites», artistically exploring one topic or another, and raising the overall level of intrigue for their listeners. On the other hand, though, it downplayed their status of «silent trend guardians»; when you restrict yourself to certain themes, it naturally becomes harder to combine this with the idea of putting your own stamp on contemporary hits. No better example of this than **The Colorful Ventures**: where every preceding album had relied on covers of recent big successes, this LP puts together a bunch of freshly written originals with a bunch of oldies’ covers — because, apparently, it was not that easy to find a lot of recent chart hits with color words in their titles. (Not that there weren’t any — Roy Orbison’s ‘Blue Angel’ from 1960 comes to mind immediately, as do a few others — but I guess not every pop hit lent itself all that well to a Ventures interpretation, and not every dashing lead guitarist has the guts to mimic a Roy Orbison vocal part, either).

Instead, the lead-in track to the album — and also the A-side for the second single off it — would be a rocking, typically Ventures-style reinvention of ‘Blue Moon’, possibly the fastest and the most drum-heavy version of the song you’ll ever find unless there’s an unreleased version by Napalm Death hanging around somewhere. Granted, by this time you are fairly sure of what to expect from a Ventures cover — speed, tightness, note-for-note perfection, clean and colorful guitar tone, skilful

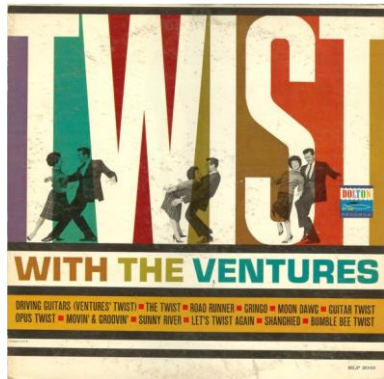
use of «bends and wobbles» — but that's no reason not to have fun tapping along with their little concoction once, after the deceptive slow introduction, it launches all the way into fifth gear.

The track selection is fairly diverse, though; The Ventures wouldn't want you to think that the only thing they are really good at is the speedy Ventures pop-rocker (though it is indeed the one thing at which they are better than at anything else), and so the «color trip» takes them into Latin territory ('Cherry Pink And Apple Blossoms', the most famous version of which came from Pérez Prado's orchestra in 1953); «genuine» epic Western ('Green Leaves Of Summer', one out of two recent covers on the album — from Dmitry Tiomkin's score to *The Alamo*); melancholy folk ('Greenfields', a hit for The Brothers Four in 1960); ballroom jazz (Woody Herman's 'Red Top', remade into more of a Chuck Berry-style number); pure country ('White Silver Sands', a hit for Don Rondo in 1957); and calypso ('Yellow Bird', originally 'Choucounne' as recorded by Katherine Dunham in 1947). Of all these, only 'Greenfields' strikes me as somewhat exquisite: for all their cheerfulness, here The Ventures try not just to convey the deeply depressing spirit of the original, but emphasize it as best they can by turning the lead guitar melody into a series of expressive sighs and moans. Everything else is, well... okay.

The two original Ventures compositions included on the LP are fairly generic pop-rockers — both 'Yellow Jacket' and 'Orange Fire' start out with the exact same chuggin' rhythm guitar melody, follow it up with a catchy-but-hollow lead figure, follow it up with a rocking solo, and then end the song in a slightly different key for the purpose of spiritual build-up. I suspect they wrote both of these in about half an hour while looking for two more numbers to pad out the album, but they're certainly harmless enough.

I do recommend listening to the album in its entirety at least once, though, with the songs in exactly the original order, and then deciding for yourself if 'Silver City', coming right at the very end, actually grips your attention tighter than everything else combined — or if I am deluding myself and there is really nothing outstanding about the song other than its little French horn gimmick in the middle. Whatever be the answer, it's still pretty clear that **The Colorful Ventures** on the whole is a nice little LP of courtier ditties built around one particular kingly song... a definition that is probably applicable to about 90% of the Ventures' albums, all except the ones that do not even have *one* kingly song to their names.





TWIST WITH THE VENTURES

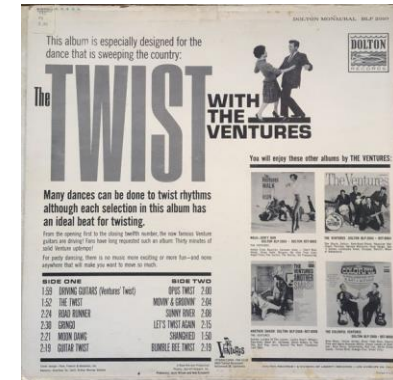
Album released:

V A L U E

January 1962

2 3 3 2 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) Driving Guitars (Ventures' Twist); 2) The Twist; 3) Road Runner; 4) Gringo; 5) Moon Dawg; 6) Guitar Twist; 7) Opus Twist; 8) Movin' And Groovin'; 9) Sunny River; 10) Let's Twist Again; 11) Shanghied; 12) Bumble Bee Twist.

REVIEW

"This album is especially designed for the dance that is sweeping the country: *THE TWIST*". For a singing pop artist, there was about a 60-70% chance probability that they would release an LP with the word *TWIST* in it around 1961–1962. For an instrumental band or artist (like Duane Eddy), that same probability increased up to 99.9%. For the Ventures, this meant having to release not one, but *two* «twist-themed» LPs in the same year. And if you subscribe to the common (and not altogether wrong, although there are always nuances) narrative of «the twist» as a safe, controlled, sanitized antidote to the «perversion» of rock'n'roll, promoted by the music industry in order to make a heavy profit on healing the alleged rifts between rebellious kids and conformist parents — well, if you do, you will probably be tempted to skip these records in your hunt for Ventures' classics. Why *SHOULD* you listen to The Ventures covering Chubby Checker when you could listen to them covering... say, the Rolling Stones? or Jimi Hendrix? or even the Carpenters, if you loyally stick around for another decade or so?



It is, however, quite telling that on later releases of the same LP the old title would be completely effaced and the album would simply be retitled **Dance!** — laconic, but utterly correct, as this is the first Ventures record that consists of nothing but up-tempo numbers to raise body heat; not a single romantic ballad or barnyard country ramble among the lot. This is not necessarily a heavenly thing, because the Ventures could do a really mean 'n' awesome atmospheric ballad, whereas the level of diversity in early Sixties' pop-rock certainly left something to be desired. But in 1962, nobody for miles around could play fast-and-exciting with as much technical verve, precision, and energy as the Ventures; in this department, they were the world's number one band with very little serious competition, while in the mood music department they hardly shared any such monopoly. Besides, it's only 25 minutes anyway, like most other Ventures' LPs. You *can* be kept up on your toes non-stop for twenty-five minutes, can't you?

As for the *twist* moniker, one should not forget that, strictly speaking, the term referred to a particular kind of dance rather than the actual music behind it — for all we know, you could «twist» to 'Johnny B. Goode' if you really wanted to — and that there is no single special castrated «rock'n'roll-lite» rhythmic pattern that distinguishes «twist» from «not twist». You can write a rocking instrumental, call it 'Driving Guitars' (because that is what it is really about), have your record label rename it 'The Ventures' Twist' and not really give a damn about the consequences (on later releases, the original title was restored because nobody cared any more; same with 'Guitar Twist' = 'Raunchy Guitar', 'Opus Twist' = 'Opus Four', and 'Bumble Bee Twist' = 'The Wasp'). So no, **Twist With The Ventures** absolutely does not «sell them out» when it comes to the actual music — it is only the packaging that closely ties the record with a certain ridiculous commercial trend of its era.

The music, in fact, recognizes the trend only by including covers of two of Chubby Checker's biggest hits — 'The Twist' and 'Let's Twist Again', both of which I prefer to the originals because the lead guitar on both is so much more enjoyable than Chubby Checker's vocals (I'm assuming this is Nokie Edwards already, having taken over the duties of principal lead guitar player over Bogle). The speed, precision, relative unpredictability, and cool twangy effects on those licks actually makes you want to *listen* to what the band is playing rather than simply dance to it, as they attempt to do the same thing to these monster hits that jazz virtuosos were doing to Tin Pan Alley standards — in a much humbler way, of course. There's even a bit of dynamic dramatism discernible about these interpretations, as the lead guitar alternates between «gentle» and «rough» picking styles, switching between caressing your ear with «surfing chords» and inflaming it with rock'n'roll-ish, aggressive chords — 'Let's Twist Again' was never *that* multi-layered when Chubby was simply using it to throw extra fuel on the fire of the ongoing dance craze.

The other recognizable (well, at that particular time, at least) covers on the record include:

(a) two more numbers from such regular clients as The Wailers — ‘Road Runner’ and ‘Shanghied’. At this point, the Ventures can eat the Wailers for breakfast when it comes to technical mastery of the instruments, overall tightness of the band and (especially) clarity of production. However, the original versions are still superior because The Wailers were early masters of that one quality The Ventures knew nothing about — *dirtiness* — and «cleaning up» their classic proto-garage compositions is much like giving a good scrub to Huckleberry Finn: you can do it if you want to, but why bother? I am able to enjoy both songs if I hear them outside of context, but if I play the originals and covers back-to-back, the result is like trying to enjoy a colorized version of a classic black-and-white movie. Give me that sleazy, dirty sax over Nokie’s clean, sharp guitar twang any time of day;

(b) Duane Eddy’s ‘Movin’ And Groovin’ — well, it’s nice to hear *this* classic moved to a different key, and it’s nice to have two guitars instead of one, with the «twang» safe-guarded by the rhythm guitar while the lead is literally doing whatever it wants, and it’s admirable that the lead guitar can replace the original saxophone without making the song lose its dynamics. But did they *really* have to include that obnoxious bit of laughter repeated after each bar of the intro? What are they, recording for Looney Tunes or something? Stupid idea;

(c) ‘Moon Dawg’. Well, everybody was doing ‘Moon Dawg’ at the time — it is not considered to have been the first proper «surf-rock» record for nothing. In this case, The Gamblers’ original version is not so vastly preferable over the cover as The Wailers — because The Gamblers (Bruce Johnston’s original band) were nice boys, too, who only wanted to have fun, and more similar in spirit to The Ventures. That said, ‘Moon Dawg’ is not a particularly great composition (can you really remember its riff?), and its value is more symbolic than rock’n’roll-a-licious, if you ask me.

The remaining six tracks are all originals, some written by The Ventures themselves and some employing the talents of their friends and collaborators — such as Jerry Allison (of The Crickets), Tommy Allsup, and Gene Moles. Some are clearly less original than others — for instance, ‘Guitar Twist’ is obviously based on the melody of ‘What’d I Say’ — and some are a bit too boringly relaxing (like the shuffling ‘Sunny River’ whose country riff feels like something Duane Eddy would knock off if they woke him in the middle of the night and told to write a song in 20 seconds); but I do like how Nokie occasionally tends to understand the idea of «twist» as a special «twisting pattern» that he should apply to his lead guitar — you can hear this particularly well on ‘Opus Twist’, where the lead riff keeps «wrapping itself» around the root chord, as if the lead guitarist were busy spinning a thread. And then there is ‘Bumble Bee Twist’, which rather predictably exploits the indestructible

Rimsky-Korsakov theme, but, fortunately, only slightly — the «buzzing» itself is more reliably supplied by the twin attack of the rhythm and bass guitar, formally making this one of the heaviest Ventures tracks up to date.

Still, there is nothing in these originals that matches the romantic drive of ‘Walk Don’t Run’, and it’s probably a good thing: even if there *had* been, the album’s association with the «era of the Twist» would have easily ruined the reputation of any pertinent instrumental theme. But if, like myself, you happen to have developed an allergy to the word itself — in its day, «twist» managed to ruin almost as many reputations as «disco» would in the next decade — take it on good faith that when The Ventures invite you to *twist* with them, what they really mean is that they want you to be as good with your guitar-pickin’ style as Nokie Edwards and Bob Bogle, not just bend your knees and wiggle your rump in a desperate last attempt to beat that painful bout of constipation.

