

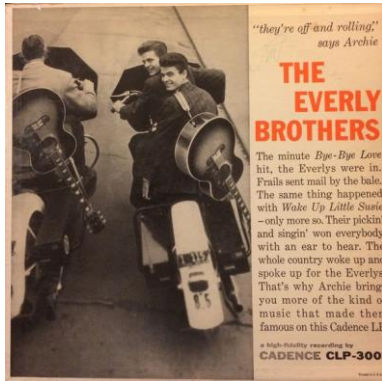
THE EVERLY BROTHERS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1956-1996</i>	<i>Early rock'n'roll</i>	<i>Wake up Little Susie (1957)</i>

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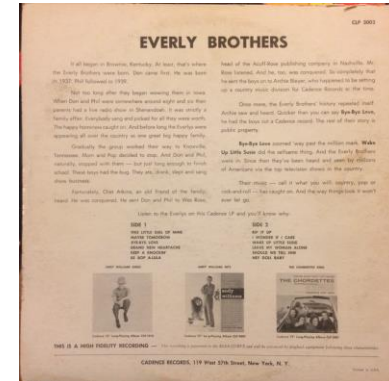


THE EVERLY BROTHERS

Album released:
December 1957

V A L U E
4 4 4 4 4

More info:



Tracks: 1) This Little Girl Of Mine; 2) Maybe Tomorrow; 3) Bye-Bye Love; 4) Brand New Heartache; 5) Keep A Knockin'; 6) Be Bop A-Lula; 7) Rip It Up; 8) I Wonder If I Care As Much; 9) **Wake Up Little Susie**; 10) Leave My Woman Alone; 11) Should We Tell Him; 12) Hey Doll Baby.

REVIEW

Instead of starting out by gushing about the beloved classics on this self-titled album — ‘Bye Bye Love’, ‘Wake Up Little Susie’, ‘I Wonder If I Care As Much’ — I beg permission to concentrate on something different and unexpected: namely, the cover of Little Richard’s ‘Keep A-Knockin’. Now that song, ‘Keep A-Knockin’, had been recorded many, many times in various jazz and jump blues versions prior to Little Richard, but I know *very* few versions that postdate Little Richard, and the only one that was any good was by the Sonics — who were arguably the only American white garage band with a mad vocalist and a mad enough sax player that could brew a tempest comparable with Little Richard’s. And this song, in his interpretation, was one of his most tempestuous ever.

So the question is: what on earth were Phil and Don Everly, two sweet, lovable, closely harmonized kids from Shenandoah, Iowa, thinking, when they chose to cover *this* particular song for their debut album? Wouldn’t it have been obvious that this is the kind of material as far removed from their comfort zone, spiritually and technically, as an Alban Berg string quartet? Or were they, like most kids those days, simply so entranced by the rock’n’roll virus that they just *had* to give it a go... and damn the torpedoes?



Whatever the initial impulse was, though, what actually matters is not where they came from but where they ended up at. They did not even begin to try to recreate the song's hystrionic, aggressive mood: there are no opening drum salvos, no maniacal sax solos or screaming, and even the tempo is subtly slowed down. Instead, what they do is capitalize on the melodic aspects of the song — turning it into a fun, catchy, friendly pop-rock number whose primary attraction now are the two brothers' close harmonies. If it were not for the lyrics of the song, one could easily see it played under the balcony of a loved one... heck, just change the words to "keep a-knockin' but *I* can't come in" and that'll be the goddamn truth. And it absolutely works. The brothers preserve the element of insistence, both through the professionalism of the backing band (keeping a steady, relentless rhythm pulse) and through never dropping down the tension in their own singing, while also purging the song of wildness — a teenage gentlemanly take on the tune that does not sacrifice its main point.

I understand that neither this number, nor Gene Vincent's equally gentrified 'Be-Bop-A-Lula', nor the seriously countrified boogie of 'Rip It Up' are ever going to count as «classic Everly stuff». But believe me, it is not every day that a decidedly non-rock'n'roll-ish outfit can take textbook rock'n'roll numbers and make them into thoroughly enjoyable, sweet and romantic pop-rock. For instance, Buddy Holly, great as he was in general, was probably at his least interesting when he did covers of stuff like 'Ready Teddy'... okay, so maybe Phil and Don, too, are at their least interesting when they do this stuff, but it's still pretty interesting. And if it really is the *worst* stuff on the entire LP, then one cannot even begin to imagine how great it is on the whole.

Some of the retrospective critical evaluations like to play the «formative» game here — too many of these unnecessary rock'n'roll numbers, too many covers, too uncertain of themselves, setting up the stage for greater things to come — bullshit, if you pardon my Klingon. The Everlys' debut presents them as fully mature, fully competent, incredibly diverse and enjoying life to its fullest in a way they would rarely enjoy it again. If we do the right thing and count the songwriting duo of Felice and Boudleaux Bryant as an integral part of the Everly Brothers (and we should), then the album actually boasts a solid 50/50 ratio of originals and covers; and if you throw in the fact that the Everlys manage to everlify Ray Charles just as superbly as they do Little Richard, well, then the LP is just a frickin' masterpiece.

One of the brothers' secrets is that at the heart of their work, behind all the sweetness and sentimentality, still lies a fairly gritty bluesy foundation. It may be a stretch, of course, but I still think that a big reason why 'Bye Bye Love', their first notable single, shot up so high in the charts were those opening choppy rhythm chords, sounding like something straight out of John Lee Hooker's textbook for a few seconds before they get undercut by the tenor sharpness of "bye bye love, bye

bye happiness" — which, in contrast, sounds like nothing out of anybody else's textbook. The verse melody, by the way, is recognizable (it is a minor variation on 'You Are My Sunshine'), but that chorus could just as well be from the German cabaret scene, for all I know. But more than any contrast between verse and chorus, what grabs you is the intensity of the vocals — sharp and searing, yet also cheerful and friendly despite the superficial gloom of the lyrics: think Hank Williams with a well-meaning youthful tease rather than nasal sneer. Or, if you want a comparison from the other side of the timeline, think of Simon & Garfunkel's cover which, like most of Simon & Garfunkel's songs, sounds compassionate, melancholic, and severely introverted. *These* guys, however, are no morose intellectual Greenwich Village loners: *their* point is to make your very bones tingle with the sound of their harmonies.

The point is actually delivered even stronger on the B-side, Don Everly's melodically plain country waltz 'I Wonder If I Care As Much'. Plain, that is, in terms of basic rhythmic structure, but never plain in terms of just how much the brothers fill up the sonic space — almost every single vowel is lovingly extended, so that you almost do not notice them catching their breath. It is not the most intimate or thought-provoking of possible interpretations; it could even be accused of being too overtly manneristic, making it hard to truly believe that "my heart can't thrive on misery, my life it has no destiny", but then again, this is no method acting: after all, when John Lennon sings "my tears are falling like rain from the sky", you don't really feel like reaching for your umbrella, either. The words do not matter as much here as the sheer intensity of their delivery. There may have been many duets and vocal bands before the Everlys, but no pop singer ever dared to go all in before the Everlys. (Well, Hank Williams did, but he was no pop singer, after all). Afterwards, there would be plenty. Before, there was none.

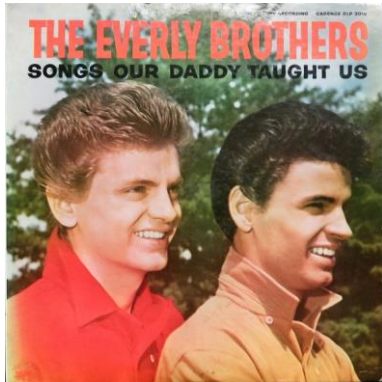
It is amusing that 'Wake Up Little Susie', the duo's second successful single, somewhat followed the formula — also written by the Bryants, also based on an upbeat acoustic pattern, and also luring the listener in a false direction with its opening chords (which play a rock'n'roll pattern not unlike the main riff of Larry Williams' 'Slow Down', though actually it was the latter that was recorded about a week after the Everlys' single came out... coincidence?). But on the other hand, it is far more melodically complex — there are at least three or four different vocal melodies here, with a rather convoluted relationship between chorus, verse, and bridge; and then there is the lyrical content, formally quite innocent (the unlucky teens fall asleep while watching a movie) but provocative enough in practice to have allegedly been banned on Boston radio sessions. The Everlys were clean lads — they'd *never* allow themselves to take advantage of poor little Susie, no sir! — but even so, it makes sense to believe that the provocation was quite intentional. After all, they *were* carried along by the rock'n'roll spirit, even if they never wished to embrace rock'n'roll's stereotypes — if they weren't, they wouldn't be what they

were, and I would probably never even begin writing about them in the first place.

By the time of the third single, the brothers felt the need for even more change, and switched from the Bryants to Ray Charles: 'This Little Girl Of Mine' obediently submitted to the procedure of being turned from jumpy, chaotic R&B to disciplined, apollonized pop — it even opens with the same perfectly coordinated descending melodic line as Elvis' 'Teddy Bear'. But unlike Elvis, the Everlys never allow themselves to become «cuddly»: there is always something about those harmonies that has a knife-like property, as if the very joining of their voices in two prevented the arisal of overtly sappy sentimentality. It would truly take a very cruel or a very ideologically zealous critic to accuse these rearrangements of «bland whiteness» or anything of the sort. On the LP, they also do the same thing to Ray's 'Leave My Woman Alone', substituting the fast gospel chug of the original for a slower, more even-paced pop-rock beat and country-based pop-rock lead guitar lines that George Harrison would later master so well.

In the end, there is not a weak number anywhere in sight: original or cover, all these songs sound every bit as lively and excited today as they did back in 1957. If you wish to think of 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' and the Ray Charles covers as filler, be my guest; I prefer to think of this entire collection as the Everly Brothers putting their unique spin on every piece of music floating around their personal space at the time, and, subsequently, filler-free. Later records would have more original compositions and, perhaps, more significant melodic breakthroughs, but the major impact that the brothers made on the world merely by announcing their presence in 1957 would never be outdone. Which is not that surprising, given that their harmonies *were* their major impact, and since it would be unimaginable to hear them improve on the state of their harmonies here, what *could* they do to raise the stakes? Invent AutoTune?





SONGS OUR DADDY TAUGHT US

Album released:
December 1958

V A L U E
1 4 3 3 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) Roving Gambler; 2) Down In The Willow Garden; 3) Long Time Gone; 4) Lightning Express; 5) That Silver Haired Daddy Of Mine; 6) Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Feet; 7) Barbara Allen; 8) Oh So Many Years; 9) I'm Here To Get My Baby Out Of Jail; 10) Rockin' Alone In An Old Rockin' Chair; 11) Kentucky; 12) Put My Little Shoes Away.

REVIEW

The hits just kept coming for the Everly brothers throughout 1958 — ‘All I Have To Do Is Dream’, ‘Bird Dog’, ‘Problems’ (we shall tackle these later) — so it must have been quite a shock for the fans to see the duo’s second LP, instead of predictably herding together their Bryant-penned pop-rock successes, stock up on dusty old folk ballads, none of which had anything to do with the rock’n’roll explosion or, let’s face it, the problems most relevant to the contemporary late Fifties teenage heart. It is hardly surprising that the LP became a commercial flop: much like Bob Dylan’s **Self-Portrait** twelve years later, this became a classic case of a beloved artist intentionally disconnecting with their audiences.



Unlike Dylan, of course, Phil and Don Everly had no particular reason to be pissed off at their audiences, and this gesture on their part was most probably driven by positive rather than negative emotions. They did, after all, have a fairly long history of singing precisely this kind of music together with their parents, Ike and Margaret, and their affection for more modern types of rock and pop music never came at the expense of their admiration for the oldies — or for their old folks, for that matter. So when they decided to take a twelve-song selection of old Appalachian ballads and country waltzes and

record them just as they are — bare-bones, with just the brothers singing harmony over acoustic guitars — this was most likely intended as a debt of gratitude to their parents (hence the album title which is simply intended to tell the truth, rather than act as some sort of symbolic defiance in the face of their teen audiences). It is also quite possible that they may have entertained some hope that maybe, just *maybe* some of their new fans from the rock'n'roll generation would use this as a chance to be introduced to some of the classic gems of the old folk tradition without inevitably associating them with their boring old parents.

If there was any such hope, it did not work: the rock'n'roll fans of 1958 were not yet ready to be «duped» into trading their blue suede shoes for old hiking boots. Nor would the album really have appealed to the residents of Greenwich Village — with a few exceptions, the songs selected by the brothers feel too mainstreamish, the musical and lyrical relics of radio-friendly bourgeois entertainment from the pre-war years rather than the stark naked, dark, bleeding, socially relevant folk, blues, and gospel tunes delivered by the likes of Odetta or Dave Van Ronk. In short, it is hard to imagine a proper market for this stuff in 1958 — I'm sure Ike and Margaret must have been delighted by the humble gift, but who else would be willing to spend one's hard-earned cash on somebody else's loving family affair?

Presumably, according to laws of the genre, this is the point where I am expected to state just how much the album was ahead of its time and just how much ungratefully unrecognized genius it contains. And I would be happy to do it (because why not?), except for the sobering realization that I have never been able to enjoy it *in its entirety*. Taken in small doses, the formula that Phil and Don offer here is indeed sweet, touching, and even somewhat innovative for its time — clean, crisp, confident acoustic guitar and unwavering, focused, and caring twin harmonies, spreading love and respect all over the place. But twelve old ballads in a row, delivered in the exact same style, exuding the exact same mood, and generally rehashing the exact same two or three rhythmic patterns and tempos, can easily wear out the patience of even a very patient person. You might easily start out with the most emotional response ever to 'Roving Gambler' and find yourself in deep sleep — maybe even lethargic — by the time 'Put My Little Shoes Away' pulls the plug on the experiment.

This also makes it extremely difficult to comment on individual selections, because you do not really want a review of such an album to turn into actual discussions of what it is that makes 'Barbara Allen' or 'I'm Here To Get My Baby Out Of Jail' a great song (which they are, don't worry about it); you are more interested in what it is that the Everlys bring out in their interpretations, and so far, I've been seriously stumped getting past words like «tenderness» and «sentimentality». Even when they boldly dare to include a creepy murder ballad ('Down In The Willow Garden', which they probably learned from

Charlie Monroe's 1947 version), its creepiness — undetectable until you scrutinize the lyrics — emerges only because of the stark contrast between the horrible story and the emotional compassion shown for the "dear little girl whose name was Rose Connolly"; Phil and Don must have been the most gallantly romantic couple of poisoners in the history of dark folk up to that moment (and, for what it's worth, their rendition of 'Willow Garden' *must* have contributed somewhat to the newly found popularity of the murder ballad genre among more contemporary folk and pop singers).

Note that there is no lack of disturbing or tragic subjects in the duo's other selections as well: themes of sin, desperation, loneliness, imprisonment, old age, and death cover about 90% of the material — I think 'That Silver Haired Daddy Of Mine', probably intended specifically as a gift for Ike, is the only song centered on mostly positive emotions (and even then, its main motive is to "*atone* to that silver haired daddy of mine", implying that you've really been a bad boy here, too). From a certain point of view, the album could deserve the epithet «gritty» — but, once again, it only works if you really get into the lyrics of the songs; otherwise, the album might as well have been called **Lullabies Our Daddy Put Us To Sleep With** (not that 'Down In The Willow Garden' wouldn't have made a darn fine lullaby).

Ultimately, the album works well as a cultural statement, and a serious potential influence on black-hearted mope-rock and terminally depressed singer-songwriters all over the globe, but probably not so well as a genuine emotional roller coaster that would keep you firmly in its grip from start to finish. This is indirectly proven by the weird circumstance of Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong and (not Green Day's) Norah Jones collaboratively remaking the entire album as **Foreverly** in 2013: the very fact that they did this proves the record's enduring cultural significance, but they also managed to make it even more boring than it used to be, which kinda hints that it was not all *that* entertaining from the beginning, either. It's good to have it — had they just recorded one or two songs like 'Willow Garden' for a regular LP, they would almost certainly have been lost among the bouncy, catchy, energetic pop hits — but it is also a safe bet that most people would just rather listen to a best-of compilation of the brothers from their glory years, and I wouldn't have the nerve to blame these people.





THE EVERLY BROTHERS BEST

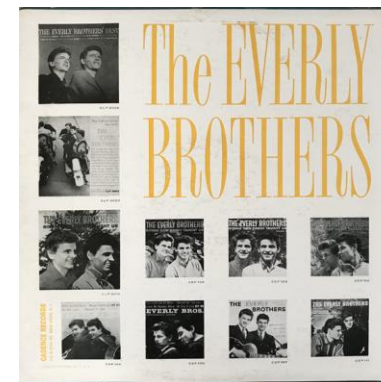
Album released:

March 1959

V A L U E

3 4 3 3 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) Bye Bye Love; 2) I Wonder If I Care As Much; 3) Wake Up Little Susie; 4) Maybe Tomorrow; 5) Should We Tell Him; 6) This Little Girl Of Mine; 7) **All I Have To Do Is Dream**; 8) Claudette; 9) **Bird Dog**; 10) Devoted To You; 11) Problems; 12) Love Of My Life.

REVIEW

I understand that Cadence was a small record label with a very limited number of cash cows (Andy Williams and the Chordettes were their biggest assets in addition to the Everlys), but that still hardly gave Archie Bleyer the moral right to fuck up the brothers' catalog in such a shameless manner. The self-titled debut was alright as far as single-compiling LPs go, the conceptual daddy-pleasing record made sense as well, but after that, the relation between the Everlys' singles and LPs becomes dreadfully confusing. Basically, all of their singles released for Cadence in between mid-1958 and early 1960, when they packed up and left for Warner Bros., could have fit on one modestly sized LP. Instead, they were divided in two and messily arranged across two separate records — 1959's **The Everly Brothers' Best** and 1960's **The Fabulous Style Of The Everly Brothers**, while the empty space on the LP was ruthlessly filled up with songs that had already been released previously on **The Everly Brothers**. Thus, as you can see from the track listing, we have already covered the entire first half of this album earlier — leaving just six more songs to discuss.



Instead of giving in to Bleyer's repugnant commercial strategy which forced poor American families to shell out extra cash for stuff they already owned (a widespread practice for the 1960s, but not yet fully endorsed by the majority of labels in the 1950s, because live and learn), we shall construct our own **Best Of The Everly Brothers** by simply focusing on the chronology of their singles from March 1958 to the end of their Cadence period, conflating the «new» songs of this record with the rest of them on **The Fabulous Style**; in practical terms, this hardly matters since you will probably just be listening to them all on one of the miriads of later Everly compilations, too numerous to mention — just be sure that they have all these tracks on them, because the brothers were on a solid roll at the time, and pretty much all of their Cadence era stuff is at least worth your ears, if not necessarily your total devotion.

Anyway, March '58 does represent a significant milestone for the boys, with the release of 'All I Have To Do Is Dream'. All of their previous singles were fairly lightweight, guided by either comical overtones ('Wake Up Little Susie') or toe-tapping bitter irony ('Bye Bye Love') — but here was a slow, courteous, gorgeous, dreamy ballad with an almost royal arrangement, as Chet Atkins himself joins the boys with an exquisite electric lead guitar part, using tremolo chords to emphasize the «dreamy» atmosphere of this poor little lament about the happiness lying just outside one's reach. The historical role of the song can hardly be overestimated: it is one of the earliest representatives of what we can call «lush pop» or «baroque pop», and there's a fairly straight connection from here to everything from the Beach Boys to the Left Banke and beyond. Yet it is also quite markedly a «teenage symphony» — the Bryants, who wrote the song as usual, couldn't help marking this on the bridge section with the unforgettable lines of "only trouble is — *gee whiz*", as if they meant it for the soundtrack of *Leave It To Beaver* or something.

In any case, this is the song that forever sealed the fate of the Everly Brothers, much like 'My Generation' did it for the Who or 'Satisfaction' did it for the Stones. Next to it, the B-side, a cover of Roy Orbison's 'Claudette', despite being far superior to Roy's own early version on Sun Records, already looks almost anachronistic — fast, bouncy, funny, totally in the style of 'Wake Up Little Susie' or 'This Little Girl Of Mine', two minutes of simple, unsophisticated joy best summarized in the frantic acoustic strum on the breaks between verses. But the contrast is fun when you just think of it in terms of a flipped-over 7-inch record — one side for the spirit, one for the body.

Oddly enough, the duo's next single reversed the principle: the danceable joke song ('Bird Dog') was the A-side, while the gorgeous ballad ('Devoted To You') was the B-side — although this might have been made by mistake, since subsequent releases would swap the sides, and both songs ultimately made the charts on their own. From a comparative perspective,

‘Devoted To You’, while still beautifully sung and melodically memorable, is a little less impressive than ‘All I Have To Do Is Dream’ — a bit less sophisticated chord-wise, a bit more folksy, and that same tremolo guitar only appears at the beginning and end of the song for some reason, as if it were just an obligatory stylistic nod to the previous hit.

‘Bird Dog’, on the other hand, is a far more attractive musical and lyrical journey than ‘Claudette’ if you’re looking for more joke material — essentially, it is Boudleaux Bryant’s attempt to write something in the style of the Coasters, as the call-and-response vocals all but *beg* for the vocal treatment of the greatest jokers in R&B history, though, admittedly, the Everlys do an okay job themselves with the high pitch on the "he’s a bird" and the low pitch on the "he’s a dog" lines. (All that’s lacking is some yakety sax from King Curtis to complete the picture). Apparently (judging by some comments I encountered), 21st century sensitivity has made the song feel somewhat ostracized (songs about two guys fighting about a girl’s attention don’t really cut it anymore), but if we are obliged to relegate all the "Leave-My-Woman-Alone" type songs to the dustbin of history, that’ll leave the shelves pretty bare, I guess. I do admire the "Johnny kissed the teacher / He tiptoed up to reach her" bit, anyway — that’s yet another bit of provocative daring on Bryant’s part, even if he cleverly indemnifies himself *and* Johnny in the next lines ("well he’s the teacher’s pet now, what he wants he’s been gettin’ now, he even made the teacher let him sit next to my baby"). And that was almost twenty years before ABBA!

Pressing on, we reach ‘Problems’ (October ’58), which is largely like a thematic follow-up to ‘Bird Dog’ — with «Johnny» out of the picture, the teenage protagonist switches the psychological focus back on himself, complaining that "my love life just ain’t swingin’ like it should", whatever *that* would specifically mean at the time. This ain’t exactly a Chuck Berry level of psychological manipulation, but then Chuck never focused all that much on the negative aspect of things — to him, everything could be quickly cured by "dropping the coin right into the slot" of the nearest juke joint, which *probably* makes ‘Problems’ a bit more relevant for Gen Z ("worries, worries pile up on my head"). Musically, though, the single greatest thing about the song is the gracefully nagging little country guitar line that somebody (possibly Chet Atkins again) plays at the end of each verse line. It’s like a little musical joke and a bit of musical teasing at the same time. Good for all those who have "problems, problems all day long" — the song will cheer you up and empathize with you.

The B-side was ‘Love Of My Life’, repeating the «one joke song, one serious song» pattern; again, like ‘Devoted To You’, not quite up to the standard of ‘All I Have To Do Is Dream’, but I appreciate the jumpy acoustic rhythm (with a little Mexican twang to it, right?), though the overall chord structure seems to be largely re-writing Buddy Holly’s ‘Listen To Me’ from earlier in the year — on the other hand, listen closely and you will hear those "I love you-oo-oo, oo-oo" harmonies *directly*

reproduced in the Beatles' 'Hold Me Tight' (heh, and now at last I have *objective* proof that there was something distinctly dilettantish about my least favorite song on **With The Beatles**).

This is as far as **The Everly Brothers' Best**, released in March 1959, takes us, but let us continue our little walk in the Everly park for the rest of 1959, shall we? From the very same month, we have 'Take A Message To Mary', another Bryant original which may have actually been inspired by **Songs Our Daddy Taught Us**, since it is uncharacteristically written in the similar style of an old jailhouse ballad. Now you may laugh at me if you wish, but I actually like the original a lot less than Bob Dylan's cover from the infamous **Self-Portrait** — not only does Bob correct the obvious melodic incongruity of the verbal stress by turning "take a message to MA-ry" into the rhythmically more adequate "take a message to Ma-RIE" (and why couldn't our poor hero's sweetheart be French, after all?), but his rougher, more electrified version would actually give the song a bit of the required «frontier feel». When the Everlys sing the song, it feels like they are doing it from some lush boudoir rather than a jail cell — and I have always felt more sympathy for the plight of Dylan's protagonist rather than Phil and Don's. Still, *this* is where it all began, and it is nice to know that the Bryants could adapt their songwriting quite professionally and comfortably to suit the current artistic inclinations of their principal clients.

The B-side was also a jailhouse song, but quite a different one — the «joke» side of the single was 'Poor Jenny', another little provocative number, in which the protagonist's sweetheart gets accidentally mistaken for the "leader of a teenage gang" after being knocked out in a drunken brawl, and locked up as a result. It's one of their catchiest and silliest numbers, unless you want to read a misogynistic streak into it, in which case it's also one of their most offensive, but hey, accidents happen. Sometimes it's a stagecoach and a shot from a careless gun, sometimes it's a party last night when some joker goes and calls the cops on the phone. If the Everly Brothers ever wanted to release an album called **Songs About Stupid People**, both parts of the single could easily be chosen as side openers.

In July 1959, the Bryant-dominated streak was finally interrupted with one of Don Everly's own compositions: '(Til) I Kissed You', a song that would, for some reason, later become a staple for various reggae artists (go figure just how they sniffed out its reggae potential). Musically and lyrically, you can sort of see why they preferred to rely on the far more sophisticated Bryant material in that period — but even with its simple chords and trivial lyrics, the song gets the job done if all you want to express is that one particular feeling. The nicest touch is arguably the pompous tom-tom roll after each of the "I kissed you" bits, as executed by Jerry Allison, drummer of the Crickets (who, after Buddy's death, would occasionally back the Everlys in the studio and on tour). The same tom-toms sound less exciting on the B-side, though: 'Oh, What A

Feeling', also written by Don, is a slow, stiff, and somewhat dreary waltz which lacks the finesse of the Bryants' ballads and seems to be rarely remembered for a good reason.

Finally, we close out 1959 with a sappy, string-drenched version of the French chanson 'Je T'Appartiens', translated into English as 'Let It Be Me' and popularized by the Everlys for the Christmas season. Now you may laugh at me *again* if you wish, but I actually like this version a lot less than... right, you guessed it, Bob Dylan's cover from the infamous **Self-Portrait**, which kinda sorta works around the song's sentimental corniness and the ruffled shirtsleeves of the Everlys' delivery. Maybe if it weren't for the Mantovani-style strings, I could have taken this easier, but as it is, 'Let It Be Me' is the first grossly overproduced item in the brothers' catalog — probably not coincidental with the fact that it was also their first song to be recorded in New York rather than Nashville. I am much more partial to the B-side, 'Since You Broke My Heart', another of Don's «originals» (actually a minor variation, I think, on one of the old Hank Williams melodies), which cleverly combines Buddy Holly's rhythm guitar style with a moody bluesy lead line (which goes along well with the "they say the blues went out of style" line) and even more of those tom-toms.

Since we shall probably not be returning to the band's Cadence years, I suppose at least a quick mention should be also made of their last singles for the label, issued already after the Everlys' defection to Warner Bros. 'When Will I Be Loved' is a Phil composition, very deceptively beginning with the same defiant blues-rock chords that open Bo Diddley's 'I'm A Man': the opening eight seconds, featuring that aggressive riff followed by a harmonica blast, will make it seem like the Everlys decided to move to Chicago for a bit, but once the vocal harmonies come in, things get back to more comfy territory — this is your everyday male insecurity they are singing about after all, not your everyday male self-confidence. And at least this version is much better than the later hit cover by Linda Ronstadt (because early Sixties' country-rock musical clichés just happen to be less annoying than mid-Seventies' country-rock ones).

Finally, we return back into the caring arms of the Bryants with 'Like Strangers' and 'Brand New Heartache', but I feel like this last single for Cadence was a bit of a dud — unlike most of the previous ones, it did not even manage to crack the Top 20, and this is because the A-side is very much just a pretty lullaby with a poorly defined hook. The duet between the acoustic guitar and the softly muffled electric slide chords is aesthetically pleasing, but «yawny», and the brothers' harmonies just flow smoothly across the valley without scaling any interesting peaks. Meanwhile, 'Brand New Heartache' is just a generic country throwaway (essentially the same song as Carl Perkins' 'Sure To Fall In Love With You', only without the latter's humorous twist) — and furthermore, with its presence the single finally commits the unforgivable crime of not

following the «gorgeous ballad / joke song» pattern of all those previous Bryant-penned singles. Well, that's what you get for releasing singles for your artists when they are no longer with you.

And with this, we conclude our evaluation of the Everlys' years at Cadence — years during which, as you can see, they had far more triumphs than duds, a situation that would not be continued quite as smoothly with their years on Warner Bros. (and is, in fact, somewhat reminiscent of the correlation between Elvis' years at Sun and at RCA). While, perhaps, not 100% consistent (but what is?), this might have been one of the most important consecutive runs of singles in the history of «lush pop», «art pop», «folk pop», «baroque pop», or whatever else you might want to call commercially-oriented pop music with retro-oriented artistic inclinations. In those years, probably only Buddy Holly could have been a worthy competitor to the unstoppable combination of the Bryants' songwriting talents and the Everlys' performing skills — and after «the day the music died», he'd have a bit of a hard time making the general public aware of his latest progress.





IT'S EVERY TIME!

Album released:

May 1960

V A L U E
2 4 3 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) *So Sad*; 2) *Just In Case*; 3) *Memories Are Made Of This*; 4) *That's What You Do To Me*; 5) *Sleepless Nights*; 6) *What Kind Of Girl Are You*; 7) *Oh, True Love*; 8) *Carol Jane*; 9) *Some Sweet Day*; 10) *Nashville Blues*; 11) *You Thrill Me*; 12) *I Want You To Know*.

REVIEW

A new decade, a new (and much bigger) record label with (probably) a far more lucrative record contract, and, perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this retrospective, a new approach to the idea of a long-playing record. All their LPs on Cadence were just compilations of singles, with the notable exception of **Songs Our Daddy Taught Us** which must have been envisioned as sort of a «side project» anyway, a «special side» of the Everlys that would only appeal to the devoted fan with a special bank account for buying up everything Phil-and-Don-related. But the times they were a-changin', and you didn't even need to have Bob Dylan and the Beatles around you to let you know that as of 1960, LPs were finally supposed to mean so much more than they used to.



This certainly does not imply that the Everly Brothers, or anybody else for that matter, turned into an «album-oriented» artistic persona overnight. On the contrary, their very first release for Warner Bros. was a single — and a single none other than the famous 'Cathy's Clown', to let the whole world know that the transition from a smaller to a larger record label has not impacted the brothers' ear for melody and harmony one single bit. We shall come back to this song later (since it would

be included on their second LP for Warner); for now, it just makes sense to note that this smash hit — alas, also the last ever #1 they would put on the US charts — was not followed up by another single, but by a full LP of new material, not a single song on which was a previously released single. **It's Everly Time** indeed, baby!

Not that I could or would argue that **It's Everly Time!** marks the brothers' transformation into «album-oriented artists», or that each and every song on here deserves your full and undivided attention in the same way that their best singles do. Few, if any, titles from here seem to be generally remembered and cherished as individual highlights, and, indeed, the hooks and tugs tend to be subtle throughout — nothing on the level of "*DON'T WANT YOUR LO-O-O-OVE...*" to kick you right out of bed and make you want to climb Mount Everest, or at least do your homework properly. But each and every song, even including the seemingly superfluous Ray Charles and Fats Domino covers, has something to say; each one has a little bit of heart and a little bit of brain to at least tempt you to come back and re-assess it once the album's over — and since the album's over in a flash (barely running over 25 minutes), you can easily fit two listens in the same time you'll have to allocate for, say, a **Highway 61 Revisited**, allowing you to develop an understanding of the Everly Brothers that runs twice as deep as your understanding of Bob Dylan — so there!

Only one song on the album was written by Don Everly in person: 'So Sad (To Watch Good Love Bad)' — and it's probably the one most people are familiar with, since it would be released as a single post-factum and frequently played in concert. Country artists like to cover it since it is one of their most Nashville-sounding tear-jerkers, starting off slow and plaintively like a Hank Williams number would do, but, naturally, that third line on which the brothers come together and make their pole jump high up in the air ("*it makes me cry... to see love die*") would be way outside Hank's reach. The song never seriously advances beyond the punch of that third line, but it's a solid enough punch to last you for two and a half minutes. More importantly, it's probably the brothers' most «mature-sounding» breakup song recorded up to date — this is not necessarily a good sign, because all too often «maturity» is embraced as a value onto itself, but there's enough dynamics here to make your journey through the bottom of the ocean bumpy enough, so it works; and now we know that the Everlys can truly be the Twin Kings of Melancholy if they want to, rather than merely the Kings of Sweet Romanticism.

It's interesting to compare the song with the ever-reliable Bryant duo's take on the same vibe: 'Sleepless Nights' is a tender, whiny, almost «sissy» ballad which merely has the protagonist crying into his pillow (we never really get to know why his girl left him in the first place — penis size problems?), whereas 'So Sad' is a subtle attempt at tackling the serious problem of feelings that simply fizzle out with time. That's not meant to diminish the compositional skill of 'Sleepless Nights', whose

oddly woven structure, without a very clear demarcating line between the verses, brings on associations with the Beatles' 'If I Fell' — and some of whose chords bring on to mind Simon and Garfunkel's 'Sounds Of Silence'. But in terms of emotional depth, this is a good example of how the brothers' own songwriting was slowly gaining the upper hand on their loyal songwriting courtiers.

Some of the songs the Bryants contribute here continue to be (at least lyrically) oriented at the horny teenage market, which is not really such a bad thing for 1960, the year when music industry would *really* try to push its cash cows in the direction of the middle-aged housewife market. 'Just In Case' sounds like something fresh out of 1957, a nice little pop-rock riff set to a groovy tempo, as if «nudging» the girl to accept that "*baby now's the time to give your heart, just in case we have to part*" (the "*heart*", of course, being a valiant metaphor for quite a different part of the female anatomy). Its placement right next to 'So Sad' is almost comical, given that the emotional distance between the two is comparable to the emotional distance between the Beatles circa 1964 and 1969; but if you re-arrange the track list so that the album *opens* with 'Just In Case' and *closes* with 'So Sad' — hey, you got yourself a *David Copperfield* of a rock opera!

The rest of the Bryants' work here is generally not as attention-grabbing, but the (moderately) fresh hooks still emerge upon a couple of listens — for instance, the grumbly shuffling tempo of 'Oh, True Love' might feel a little boring, but just wait until the vocal ascension in the bridge section ("*baby you're great, baby you're keen, baby all of my friends are just about green*"), giving the song quite an epic feel. Ballads like 'Some Sweet Day' and 'You Thrill Me' are merely catchy, without that much to say; and the odd one out really is 'Nashville Blues', a song that is *actually* bluesy — at least the intro, with that stinging guitar that's almost more Chicago than Nashville, prepares you for a blues number, before the song crosses over into country-pop. It's a fairly weird creation, a mix of styles and moods that absolutely nobody remembers from the Everlys but which is definitely a stand-out track on this album, even if one might hesitate to call it a «highlight».

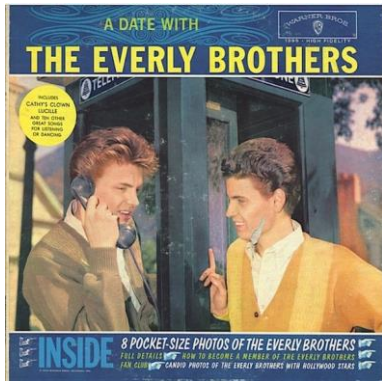
The non-Bryant cover material on the record is nothing to particularly revere, but everything sounds nice. A couple of Crickets' members contribute the pleasant Buddy Holly tribute 'That's What You Do To Me', just to show the world what a Buddy Holly-type song sounds like in the hands of the Everlys (pretty good, but I do miss Buddy's hiccups). Ray Charles' 'What Kind Of Girl Are You' is just the kind of Ray Charles song that Phil and Don can convert to their own purposes (perhaps because in Ray's own version it was actually called 'What Kind Of Man Are You' and sung by Mary Ann Fisher, rather than Ray himself). 'Carol Jane', contributed by a little known Kentucky-born singer called Dave Rich, is a sweet little boppy tune where the playful bass riff matters almost as much as all the harmonizing; once again, the brothers totally wash

away the border between «country» and «pop», not to mention how they are always coming up with new ideas on where to direct their harmonies even on trifles such as these. Listen to how the opening "*Carol, Carol, Carol Jane...*", chanted in unison, then splits apart into a supportive vibrating vocalize from one voice and the main vocal melody from the other one; just a small extra touch, for sure, but also a perfect illustration of how the brothers were never content with merely double-tracking their harmonies — an impatient, experimental mindset that would be inherited by all the great harmonizers of the pop world to come, from the Beatles to the Beach Boys to Simon and Garfunkel and others.

Even such obvious filler as a cover of Fats Domino's 'I Want You To Know', when you give the recording a true chance, eventually begins to make sense. Why should the Everly Brothers be covering Fats Domino? But then I gave [the original](#) a spin and yes, it's a fine Fats groove but... doesn't that vocal sound just a tad too *thin* for this kind of song? Doesn't it sound like the kind of groove that could profit from a tougher, tighter, more melodic vocal arrangement? Okay, maybe you think that it doesn't; but even so, it is perfectly legitimate to ask that question and try out that approach. And for the Everlys, it actually makes more sense than covering 'Ready Teddy', because 'Ready Teddy' is a kick-ass rock'n'roll number which has little use for a different, softer vibe — but 'I Want You To Know' is a tender love song at heart, and they do it just as much justice, in their own brotherly way, as Fats does. Yes, a trifle, but a working trifle at that.

In short, even if absolutely nothing off this record ever ends up on best-of collections, with the possible exception of 'So Sad', this is still no excuse to avoid it. The brothers were at the peak of their creative powers in that era, and one of the very few American acts who could put out an entire (if still drastically short) LP of material that could be relatively unassuming and still perfectly tasteful and enjoyable from top to bottom. And indeed, one might think that with most of the classic rock and roll heroes of the 1950s either dead or «invalidated» by 1960, it was truly **Everly Time!** — no swooping strings, no crooning, no faking, just a healthy mix of rock, pop, country, and folk influences with some of the most inventive vocal harmonies to go around. Too bad it didn't last all that long.





A DATE WITH THE EVERLY BROTHERS

Album released:

V A L U E

More info:

October 1960

2 4 3 2 3



Tracks: 1) Made To Love; 2) That's Just Too Much; 3) Stick With Me Baby; 4) Baby What You Want Me To Do; 5) Sigh, Cry, Almost Die; 6) Always It's You; 7) **Love Hurts**; 8) Lucille; 9) So How Come (No One Loves Me); 10) Donna, Donna; 11) A Change Of Heart; 12) **Cathy's Clown**.

REVIEW

It is a bit odd that Warner Bros. decided to hold off re-releasing their latest acquisition's hottest single until their *second* LP for the label — in fact, what with its humble position at the very end of the record, it's almost as if 'Cathy's Clown' were included on it at the last minute to fill up space and round the number of songs to the typical 12 tracks on a US LP. But better late than never, and it's not as if the song felt completely out of place when taken out on **A Date With The Everly Brothers**. It does have its unique properties, but they would only have made it feel special on *any* Everly Brothers LP ever released.



The funny thing is, when thinking about the commonly stated influence of 'Cathy's Clown' on the Beatles — most notably by way of its loud, up-and-down-the-scale double vocal harmonies that were appropriated for 'Please Please Me' and then prominently featured in most of the Beatles' early hit singles — I cannot get rid of the idea of one of those «accidental breakthroughs», like Dave Davies' bad amp or Tony Iommi's cut-off fingertips, that sometimes result in new pathways

opening up for the development of musical ideas. This is probably because those harmonies as used by the Beatles are typically used to express the most natural kind of emotion — a sort of triumphant exuberance, which becomes totally associated with the song even if the lyrics might suggest a different reading (after all, isn't 'Please Please Me' really about a guy expressing acute concern over his girl hesitating to give him a blowjob?).

But in 'Cathy's Clown', there seems to be a genuine dissonance between *intent* and *result*. The song intentionally starts out like a resolute, powerful military march, with the appropriate drum fills and all — the protagonist is determined to make a stand — and then in come the vocals that were *probably* meant to sound defiant, if not downright menacing, but instead... somehow end up giving out a totally positive, if not downright loving, vibe in the end. Looking at the lyrics, you'd think the song should have been sung in a Lennon-tone *à la* 'You Can't Do That' ("I'm gonna let you down and leave you flat, *BITCH!*"), yet Phil and Don, natural-born sissies as they are, simply cannot address a girl with lead or venom on their minds, so the «stand» against being cheated upon and humiliated in public quickly becomes a submissive plea. In the process, a new style of singing is born — the «rock-anger-turned-pop-exuberance» style. Of course, it's just one of many different possible takes on what makes the song special, but special it is — as was clearly felt by trans-Atlantic audiences at the time, who sent it to the top of the charts both in the US and in the UK, only the second time the Everlys achieved this after 'All I Have To Do Is Dream'... and the very last one.

What feels strange to me is that the brothers clearly must have known they were onto something different here. Look at the song's construction — it's got a 32-second verse-cum-chorus repeated *thrice* in the exact same manner, with absolutely no variations or distractions, and only a tiny 16-second long bridge repeated *twice* in between the choruses. This means they were so thrilled with that harmonic style that they were absolutely sure the public would be just as thrilled with them hammering it down their throats, take after take, and that's exactly what happened. However, as their recordings both in 1960 and over the following years show, they were quite reluctant to expand with that «triumphant harmony» style — as if patiently waiting for the Beatles to come and take it over, with 'Please Please Me' followed by 'From Me To You', 'She Loves You', 'I Want To Hold Your Hand', etc. etc. Meanwhile, they themselves would decide to hold back and hone the «softer» side of their craft with songs like 'So Sad', 'Walk Right Back', etc. How often does one break one's way inside a hidden gold mine, only to pick up a single nugget and walk away, mumbling "*oh, I'm no good at gold-digging anyway, I'd rather some younger whippersnapper came along and finished this for me?*" With a little extra push, Phil and Don might have been the Beatles... instead, they ended up sort of becoming Cathy's clowns, as insensitive as that sounds.

Not that this is reason for emotional devastation or anything, because on the whole, **A Date With The Everly Brothers** is no more or less consistent than their first LP for Warners, and because it is always best to let artists wallow in the groove they feel is naturally best for them. (It is, in fact, quite possible that the brothers intentionally followed 'Cathy's Clown' up with the much more soft and subdued 'So Sad' because they were afraid of this new style initiating some sort of «Everlymania» which they could never have handled as well as the Fab Four).

Despite the changing times, the brothers still persist in trying to put their own stamp on blues-rock and rock'n'roll, as seen from their covers of Jimmy Reed's 'Baby What You Want Me To Do' and Little Richard's 'Lucille' — the former being very much a waste of tape (really, the song only works with Jimmy's own minimalistic vibe, trying to put a classy Nashville touch on it only spoils the effect), and the latter actually sounding a little *weird*, as the brothers draw out Little Richard's short vocal outbursts to near-baroque lengths, attempting to stress the song's romantically wistful potential. There's even an almost psychedelic little pause before the instrumental sections, marked only by a desperate "*ohhhhhh...*" and a distant-thunder-on-the-mountain drum fill, which, for a tiny bit, makes it feel like the song is melting down right before our eyes, though it quickly patches itself up again. It is still a failure on the whole, because 'Lucille' is one of those songs that really does not gain anything from any attempts at innovative terraforming, and generally, I suppose, the Everlys just needed to throw a clearly marked bone to their old fans from the rock'n'roll era, but hey, at least it actually gives you something to write about. (I mean, most people don't even *notice* that meaningful pause!).

The rest of the tracks are more or less equally divided into those self-penned by Phil and Don and those contributed by the Bryants (only one other track, 'Stick With Me Baby', was contributed by Mel Tillis, at that time more of a songwriter for country artists than a hitmaker for himself — and there's really nothing special about it, either). Not surprisingly, the Bryants still win: other than the lucky fluke of 'Cathy's Clown' (for which Don eventually took all the credit after a series of legal battles in the 2010s), the Everly originals on Side A of the LP are stylistically pleasant rather than hooky — the only exception is the opening number, 'Made To Love', which you might remember — or take my advice and memorize — for the proto-Mötley Crüe chorus of "*Girls! Girls! Girls!*", except that the action does not take place in a strip bar, but rather in a plain old-fashioned household where the Everlys' father is taking them aside for a little birds-and-bees talk. It's really just a funny trifle, with a Buddy Holly-style chorus married to a more surf-like verse style, possibly more suited to the likes of Jan & Dean than a «mature» duo like the Everlys, but it's kinda funny how the album begins with 'Made To Love', introducing the protagonist to his upcoming struggles with the opposite sex, and ends with 'Cathy's Clown', showing how easy it is to fuck things up with "*that special girl who'll sweep you off your feet*". Perhaps the «trifle» is strategically placed, after all —

A Date With The Everly Brothers is hardly what we'd call a concept album, but it does run the full gamut of all conceivable emotional states that have to do with male-female relationships, at least up until the age of 20 or so.

The songs that people will recognize more easily, or at least identify with more easily, are, I think, mostly on the second side of the album. This is where you will find the catchy pop nugget 'So How Come (No One Loves Me)', which the Beatles would later take with them to [their BBC sessions](#), although their harmonies did not really stand a chance against the cleaner, more delicate and expressive Phil-and-Don duo — definitely not in a spontaneous live environment, at least. My only problem with the song is that its depressive lyrics, with which I'm quite liable to identify at times ("*if you wonder who the loneliest creatures in the world can be / they're the ugly duckling, the little black sheep and me*" is pure Bryant Brilliance!), do not form a perfect match with the sprightly tempo; without the lyrics, this is just a quirky, catchy little pop-rock number, childishly seductive in atmosphere rather than properly melancholic.

Another song that may have subconsciously influenced the Beatles is 'Always It's You', the B-side to 'Cathy's Clown'; I think it is possible to directly trace Paul's "it's you... you, you you" chorus in 'Hold Me Tight' to the "it's you, always it's you" chorus here, although, much to the Beatles' honor, their melodic connections to the Everlys, like most of their other influences as well, were in terms of chord-borrowing rather than outright melody-stealing. Of course, the main difference is that the Everlys lay down their vocal melodies subtly, with thin, delicate brush strokes, compared to the Beatles' broad, pushier approach (I think it wasn't until 'Here, There And Everywhere' that Paul finally mastered that gentle-sensitive touch) — which, for the good of us all, places them in what we could call complementary emotional distribution.

Sometimes, though, «thin and delicate» definitely works better for me than any kind of embellishment, and I am, of course, speaking of 'Love Hurts', the ballad that the Everlys, for technical reasons, could not release as a single and had to tolerate their (anti-)thunder stolen first by Roy Orbison, and then, more than a decade later, by Nazareth. With all due love and respect for Roy's golden timbre, and only slightly less so for the recently departed Dan McCafferty, I think that it is the quiet, minimalistic delivery of the Everlys that shall forever remain the «default» version of the song for me. The reason is that both Roy and Dan want to show me *explicitly* just how much "love hurts" — Roy gallantly putting his heart on his sleeve like a medieval court minstrel and Dan ripping it out like a hyper-emotional Italian opera singer. Meanwhile, the Everlys hit all the right notes without overstating their case. That thin, wavery vibrato running through their voices during the verses is really all it takes for me to get the tragic message of the song. (And I don't much care for the cheesy strings on the Roy Orbison version — although, admittedly, I wouldn't mind an exquisite guitar solo like Manny Charlton's on top of

Phil and Don's vocal delivery; I think that it captured the true spirit of the song better in the Nazareth version than McCafferty's overblown vocals).

Overall, now that I look back at the track listing, 'Cathy's Clown' and 'Love Hurts' are the only clear stand-outs, but of the remaining selection, it is only the Jimmy Reed cover that I find impossible to enjoy. Even those tracks which completely conform to the definition of «filler» — 'A Change Of Heart', for instance, a 100% generic Hank Williams imitation if there ever was one — have their atmospheric charm, with tasteful guitars, colorful pianos, and beautiful harmonies. It would have been the simplest of things to spoil the classic Everly Brothers sound in 1960, turning their art into orchestrated pap for easy listening, but, fortunately, nobody had the bad taste to spoil a good formula... not yet, at least.



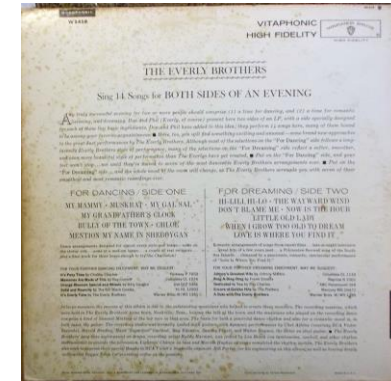


BOTH SIDES OF AN EVENING

Album released:
August 1961

V A L U E
3 3 3 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) My Mammy; 2) **Muskrat**; 3) My Gal Sal; 4) Grandfather's Clock; 5) Bully Of The Town; 6) Chlo-E; 7) Mention My Name In Sheboygan; 8) Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo; 9) Wayward Wind; 10) Don't Blame Me; 11) Now Is The Hour; 12) Little Old Lady; 13) When I Grow Too Old To Dream; 14) Love Is Where You Find It.

REVIEW

[How Music Row & Acuff-Rose Killed The Everly Brothers](#), goes the title of a Web publication retelling the story of how Phil and Don Everly parted ways with their publisher, Wesley Rose, and how this rift almost instantaneously turned their diamond carriage back into a pumpkin. Details might be found over at that source, or a couple thousand other biographical write-ups; all that matters to us is that, due to a clash of personalities and the inherent imperfection of certain capitalist practices, by 1961 The Everly Brothers were cut off not only from the services of their most loyal and reliable court songwriters (the Bryants), but even from their *own* services, deprived of the right to publish and record songs they wrote themselves.



Would things have been significantly different, had their relationship with Acuff-Rose Music been somehow salvaged? I would hesitate to offer an opinion — on one hand, it is true that the Bryants and the Everlys wrote some of the best pop songs on the market during that short late Fifties / early Sixties interval when rock'n'roll was in decline, and that the strong influence of that brilliant stretch on the soon-to-follow British Invasion bands is undeniable; with the brothers effectively shot down in mid-air (or, if you want to take the industry's side in this quarrel, effectively shooting themselves in the foot),

they might have missed a real chance to «graduate» as the duo that led America's pop music to some of its greatest artistic heights. On the other hand, we also have quite a few cases of talented American pop artists from the same time period who, despite not having experienced the same problems, were still unable to properly hold their ground against the tidal wave of the new generation — from Roy Orbison to Del Shannon and the like, they either faded away or had to remain satisfied with some sort of «secondary» status in terms of fame and fortune.

In the end, it was probably more of a deep personal tragedy than a global impact kind of event: what would *you* feel if you were an aspiring songwriter, content, perhaps, to work within the relatively permissive framework of a specific genre such as «country-tinged pop», but still interested in expanding the limits of its musical language — and then found yourself unable to pursue that dream through some absurd legal decision? In a way, it's a wonder that The Everly Brothers still remained in the musical profession at all, let alone continued to make their own records and still try to find new ways in which to express and develop themselves. Lots of other people would just screw it all and go into real estate instead, or start selling fine leather jackets. Not Phil and Don, for whom music meant everything. Well, music *and* amphetamines, to be more accurate — but that's, like, two sides of the same coin anyway.

Anyway, nothing predicted a thunderstorm on the horizon as 1961 swept away 1960 and brought the brothers yet another success with 'Ebony Eyes' and 'Walk Right Back', two equally popular sides of the same single that briefly pushed them back into the Top 10 after the (relative) letdown of 'Like Strangers'. Frankly speaking, John D. Loudermilk's 'Ebony Eyes' is fairly maudlin — a pretty, but somewhat artificial tear-jerker, one of those unlucky ballads that, musically, sound like a gentle sentimental under-the-balcony serenade but spoil it all with Terribly Tragic Lyrics (this time, the protagonist's love interest dies in a plane crash), and that's not even mentioning the corny spoken-word interlude in the middle. It doesn't help matters much, either, that the chords and harmonies in the intro are taken almost directly from the intro to Elvis' 'It's Now Or Never' — a song that, whether you like it or not, was at least a perfectly adequate representative of the «romantic-candle-light-prelude-to-a-night-of-passion» genre. Here, though, it's like quenching animal passion with a brutally cold shower.

'Walk Right Back', on the other hand, is a terrific little pop song that the Everlys took off the hands of Sonny Curtis, who was at his songwriting peak at the time ('I Fought The Law', 'More Than I Can Say', etc.). The simple, shuffling acoustic riff is one of those atmospheric nonchalant-walk-in-the-park-on-a-sunny-day creations, yet its embedded minor chords leave some space for melancholy, which makes the lyrics — once again, about separation, loneliness, and yearning — feel much more at home with the melody than they do on 'Ebony Eyes'. The song's main hook is when the gentle country-pop shuffle

briefly gives way to a near-military march on the "*bring your love to me this minute!*" bit, a subtle and clever mood swing that grabs your attention if it had been previously lost due to the softness of the song — then, for the ultimate resolution, cuts off the violence once again and drops back into purring summer day melancholy. Not a bad match at all, Sonny Curtis with The Everly Brothers.

Then came the crash — and, strangest of all, over what? A recording of ‘Temptation’, a rusty oldie from the golden days of Bing Crosby that, ironically, had originally been produced (way back in 1933) by Wesley Rose, but whose publishing rights did not belong to him. It was old-fashioned, a little cheesy, a bit difficult to properly modernize, yet, for some reason, Phil and Don liked it so much (allegedly, a vision of Don rearranging Bing Crosby’s version came to him in a frickin’ *dream*) that they sacrificed their relations with their own publishing firm to get it out on the market. It did go on to top the UK charts, but was far less successful in the US, and, frankly, it’s not the kind of song over which I’d personally go to battle with the system. Maybe it was just a pretext, though, for the brothers to fight their own little war of independence — which, for the moment, resulted in being cut off from recording any songs by their own major songwriters, including themselves... and meanwhile, their new record label was impatiently awaiting loads of material for their next LP.

This is an important angle from which to approach **Both Sides Of An Evening**. The fact that no songs on it are credited to either the Bryants or the Everlys is immediately obvious, but it takes a bit more effort to realize that no songs on it are credited to any contemporary songwriters, *period* — it’s all folk, country, and Tin Pan Alley oldies from the last three or four decades. Yet unlike something like **Songs Our Daddy Taught Us**, the record somehow manages to avoid feeling like a nostalgia trip: having lost all their songwriters, the brothers still retain their loyal Nashville sidemen, and all the songs feature the usual polish, snappiness, and elegance of America’s finest pop music team at the time. Much to their credit, if you forget to look up the relevant song information before turning up the volume, the only vibe you’ll be getting from this stuff is an early Sixties vibe.

The title of the record refers to its thematic separation, with livelier and more danceable songs mostly placed on Side A and slower, moodier ballads occupying most of Side B — a strategy that seems to have been *en vogue* around the time (notably, the Elvis team did exactly the same with **Something For Everybody** the same year), but, in my opinion, never manages to stand the test of time: too many ballads in a row, no matter how pretty or well-polished, are a serious burden on one’s attention span, and it is hardly surprising that most of the people commenting on the LP seem to prefer Side A, myself included. After all, a good landscape is one that frequently alternates between peaks and valleys, rather than putting the

Alps on your left and the Great Plains on your right. But maybe they thought, at the time, that a structural trick like this might at least detract some listeners from noticing the overall «antiquity» of the material.

On which point they really shouldn't have worried. The first seven seconds of the album open with a mighty punch that would soon be directly copied by The Beatles for their own arrangement of 'Twist And Shout', and a racing guitar riff that was never a part of the original 'My Mammy' as sung by, say, [Al Jolson](#) in *The Jazz Singer*. Fortunately for the Everlys, they don't have to put on no blackface, but they do have to rearrange the song so that it now sounds like a contemporary pop number, and it's a beautiful synthesis of vocal harmonies, thunderous rhythm section, complex guitar interplay, and immaculate mix, all of it taking up the space of just two minutes. Honestly, it could have been a hit, but the brothers opted for something even more adventurous as the lead single off the album (and paid the price for it).

That particular something was 'Muskrat', a cover of an old humorous country ditty by Merle Travis, completely remade as a dark-tinged, almost proto-psychedelic dance number, with one of the weirdest arrangements in Everly history. Opening with a «rusty-spring» bass line where each note feels as if bouncing off a rubber ball, a reverberated swamp-style guitar riff, and a percussion track sounding like a pack of rattlesnakes, it adds a whole other dimension to Travis' original set of animalistic metaphors on the «life sure ain't no rose garden» idea — the guitars and drums add a nervous, paranoid, and even slightly shamanistic tweak to the song. For the first time in their lives, it is as if The Everly Brothers engage in a bit of black magic right before our eyes: I picture them actually brewing some potent witches' brew, chanting "*muskrat, muskrat, what makes your head so slick?*" and "*groundhog, groundhog, why is your back so brown?*" as they calmly disembowel the poor dumb animals, spilling their guts inside the ugly-smelling black cauldron or something. Possibly their audiences pictured something similar in horror, seeing as how the song barely cracked the Top 100 when it was released in the US (it still reached #20 on the UK charts, though, what with the Everlys' overall overseas popularity still at a much higher level than in their native country — or maybe those Macbeth-reared Englishmen were just more tolerant of witchcraft).

Anyway, while 'Muskrat' is an obvious stand-out track on the album and an odd highlight of the brothers' career as a whole, I really dig most of the content of Side A. The old vaudeville number 'My Gal Sal' is remade as a *new* vaudeville number — slow, sleazy, filled with cool slappy bass licks from Floyd Lightnin' Chance and a shrill, piercing, unusually aggressive electric guitar solo (probably from Hank Garland). 'Grandfather's Clock' becomes a fast and lively country-pop romp with a Chet Atkins melody crossing it from top to bottom with the usual combination of speed, smoothness, and style. Even a hicky throwaway track like 'Mention My Name In Sheboygan' is hard to resist, with Marvin Hughes' barrelhouse piano

dusting off some long-forgotten Fats Waller vibe and sharpening it up for 1961. And all through the set, the Everlys' twin harmonies remain tight, uplifting, and in no way indicative of any potential troubles clouding the brothers' attitude. Even if «beneath this mask they are wearing a frown», you couldn't really see it.

The «slow side» is consistently graceful as well but, as I already said, a bit hard to fully concentrate on. The funny thing is that they actually did *two* different versions of 'Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo' — a super-slow balladeering take and a [fast, upbeat, jazzy take](#), driven by a lilting and fluent, Wes Montgomery-style jazz guitar; a few available versions of the album (such as the digital copy I have, in which most of the songs are introduced by short spoken introductions by the brothers) accidentally include the fast rather than slow version, and while I realize it is a bit banal to always prefer fast over slow, in this case the exceptional guitar work is a great extra argument (no idea who actually is playing, though, as the recording sessions for May 31, 1961 show no fewer than five session guitarists). Yet the concept had to take precedence over individual song quality, and so the generic version of the record only has the slow ballad take, alas.

Unfortunately, the rest of the songs just sound *nice*; even if they are all dutifully changed into country-pop clothes, the potential for transformation is nowhere near as grand here as it is in the case of 'My Mammy' or 'Muskrat', and with the exception of the steady bass clip-clop of the cowboy's horse on 'Wayward Wind', the rest of the ballroom arrangements get glued to each other and offer few moments of individuality to anybody but the most persistent listener, which in this case sort of excludes yours truly. It's just decent, solidly performed Everly Brothers balladry, giving you more of those angelic harmonies and first-rate Nashville arrangements that we already know pretty much everything about.

Of course, you just might be a sucker for old mushy Tin Pan Alley ballads like 'Don't Blame Me' re-recorded with a strong, toe-tappy rhythmic foundation and steel guitars rather than symphonic orchestras — so I'm not exactly saying it's all pointless or anything. But if Side A of the album does properly convey an adventurous spirit — take several different slices of Americana and update them for the new decade — then Side B comes out as much more perfunctory, bringing back to mind the simple truth that, one way or another, the Everlys had to cope with a dearth of new material. For the moment, they did a pretty good job of masking their troubles; but clearly, this ruse could not go on indeterminately.

