

GERRY AND THE PACEMAKERS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1963-1988</i>	<i>Classic pop-rock</i>	<i>How Do You Do It? (1963)</i>

Only Solitaire

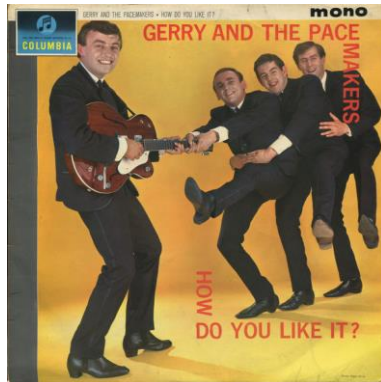
Artist: *Gerry and the Pacemakers*

Years: *1963-1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

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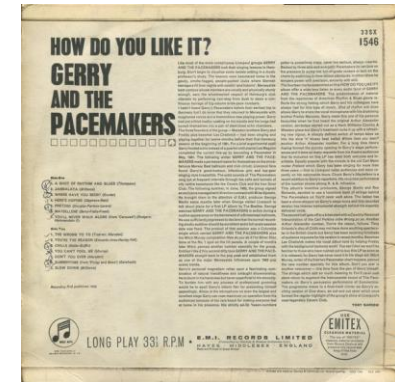
HOW DO YOU LIKE IT?

Album released:

October 1963

V A L U E
3 2 4 2 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) A Shot Of Rhythm And Blues; 2) Jambalaya; 3) Where Have You Been?; 4) Here's Hoping; 5) Pretend; 6) Maybellene; 7) **You'll Never Walk Alone**; 8) The Wrong Yo Yo; 9) You're The Reason; 10) Chills; 11) You Can't Fool Me; 12) Don't You Ever; 13) Summertime; 14) Slow Down.

REVIEW

It is, of course, ironic *and* telling that 'How Do You Do It?', a song that the Beatles allegedly hated when it was forced on them and ultimately rejected as their next single in favor of 'Please Please Me' — and the world would never be the same again — anyway, that very same song went instead to Gerry and the Pacemakers, and became their first #1 in their homeland. *That* particular irony is well known; much less known today is the other kind of irony — namely, that Gerry and the Pacemakers actually played that song much, much better than the Beatles.



Admittedly, the Beatles never released an official version of 'How Do You Do It?'; the one eventually published on the first volume of the **Anthology** series is little more than an early demo, and *maybe*, had the lads been pressed firmly, they would have turned it into something more respectable than the sappy-fluffy cornball piece it is on that record, with John trying to portray cheap sentimentality and the others supplying suitably cornball harmonies. But these are hypotheticals; the reality is that Gerry Marsden found just the perfect vocal pitch for the song — loud, brash, playful, defiant, while the rest of the band tightened up their belts and delivered a punchy, vivacious Merseybeat sound that pretty much expelled all the corny sentimentality from the track. No la-la-la harmonies, either. And Les Maguire's steady, self-assured, slightly jazzy piano

playing at the heart of the song (including the solo) sounds not only more professional, but even more exciting than quite a few (though certainly not all) rhythm and lead guitar tracks on contemporary Beatles recordings.

This is not to say that there ever was a time, even a very brief period of time, when Gerry and the Pacemakers, Liverpool's main original competition for the Fab Four, could be considered their superiors or even their equals. Maybe some near-sighted, old-fashioned musical critics, fooled by the seemingly same volume level of screaming girls whenever a Merseybeat group appeared on stage, could not feel the difference between 'How Do You Do It' and 'Please Please Me', but I really have no idea how one could play the Beatles' and the Pacemakers' first LPs back-to-back and not immediately understand which one is the real thing — a path to the future — and which one is the facsimile — a petrification of the present.

Ironically, Gerry Marsden himself would place his band squarely into the Beatles' camp ("[The Beatles and ourselves](#), we let go when we get on-stage... in the south, I think the groups have let themselves get a bit formal; on Merseyside, it's beat, beat, beat all the way"). Indeed, brother Freddie Marsden pounds on his kit and thrashes his cymbals with pretty much the same energy as Ringo Starr, and brother Gerry's and bassist Les Chadwick's well-coordinated rhythm-bass twin attack chugs with the same general power and defiance as Lennon-McCartney. Next to this, bands like the Shadows do sound fairly rigid and scholarly (then again, they have always sounded rigid and scholarly even without any comparison). These are all trademarks of the Liverpool rock'n'roll sound circa 1963, in which the Beatles were far from unique.

Yet there is not a single song on the Pacemakers' debut album that would rival the rock'n'roll fire of 'I Saw Her Standing There'. Instead, the Pacemakers open with a cover — a *cover!* — of Arthur Alexander's 'Shot Of Rhythm And Blues', a fine song in its own right, but slower, a little more pompous, and a little stiff: note that although the Beatles also liked the song and frequently performed it live in the early days (a nice version with a very leonine Lennon on vocals can be found on the **BBC Sessions**), *they* never chose to put it on any of their studio albums. On the other hand, the Pacemakers' performance is technically flawless — and the sound and mix feel really great, which is no wonder considering that the band, like the Fab Four, was produced by George Martin.

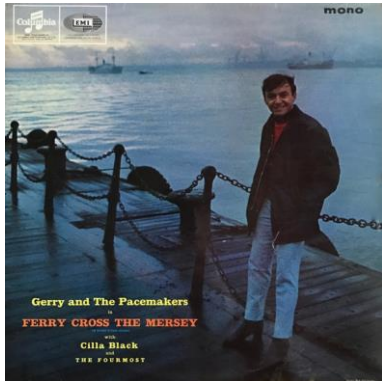
The biggest problem is that the Pacemakers were not songwriters. Of the 14 songs, only one is an original: credited to Gerry, 'Don't You Ever' is a laughably unoriginal nursery pop ditty with perfectly predictable chord changes in the middle section and a weirdly disjointed «dark blues» guitar solo which does not really fit in with the joyful mood of the song. The rest is just a mish-mash of the usual fare: a little proper rock'n'roll (Chuck Berry's 'Maybellene', which adds nothing to the original but detracts quite a bit of something; Carl Perkins' 'Wrong Yo-Yo', which detracts nothing from the original but adds only

clearer production values), a little melodic R&B (Arthur Alexander's 'Where Have You Been?'; Tony Orlando's 'Chills', with a funny falsetto explosion from Gerry), and some oldies-but-goldies which we will never associate with Gerry and the Pacemakers just because ('Jambalaya', 'Summertime').

Funny as it may seem, the actual lonely highlight on this record is the band's cover of the one song that the Beatles would never have attempted — the Rodgers-Hammerstein classic 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. Although Gerry Marsden is no Sinatra and no Elvis, his vocals *are* suitable for anthemic, operatic musicals, and he pulls it off splendidly, without the power and aristocratic class of a well-trained singer yet with all the right notes and all the right feelings: no wonder the performance went as far as to influence the Liverpool Football Club and eventually spread in that function all over the world a long, long time before 'We Are The Champions' did the same trick (with far less taste, I might add). But in the long run, this, too, goes against the Pacemakers' intended image as rebellious, beat-centered rock'n'roll kids: they were too, let's say, gentlemanly to be able to convincingly uphold it.

Yet, all said and done, **How Do You Like It?** still remains a fun, easily listenable record. Really, it may be worth it if only for the overall sound: whenever you get tired of the sloppy, scratchy, lo-fi jumble of early garage bands, yearning for stuff that is decades old *and* sounds crispy and clean, remember that you can rarely go wrong with a George Martin production. True enough, on their first run the Pacemakers have to be heard mainly in order to better place the Beatles inside their historical context: you gain a whole new perspective on the greatness of **Please Please Me** that way. But on its second run, **How Do You Like It?** is just an excellent illustration of the «average» Merseybeat sound circa 1963, a sound which was unique back then in its own way and has never since been properly replicated.





FERRY CROSS THE MERSEY

Album released:

V A L U E

February 1965

2 3 4 1 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) *It's Gonna Be Alright*; 2) Why Oh Why; 3) Fall In Love; 4) Think About Love; 5) (The Fourmost:) I Love You Too; 6) (The George Martin Orchestra:) All Quiet On The Mersey Front; 7) This Thing Called Love; 8) Baby You're So Good To Me; 9) I'll Wait For You; 10) She's The Only Girl For Me; 11) (Cilla Black:) Is It Love; 12) Ferry Cross The Mersey.

REVIEW

In the spring of 1964, Gerry and the Pacemakers faced a tough challenge. The previous year, they had somehow managed to keep face in their native country by scoring three #1 singles — exactly as many as the Beatles, in fact — and while neither the screaming fans nor the stern critics would probably be as crazy as to regard them in the same league with the Fab Four, they could certainly build a respectable case for the art of riding the big guys' coattails. But come 1964, the Beatles had moved on from the conquest of England to conquering the world — which pretty much meant conquering the US at the time — and with this kind of acceleration, it was far from obvious that poor Gerry Marsden and his pals would not fly off and bash their brains out against the nearest wall at the cross-Atlantic turn.



Fortunately for them, when the Beatles cracked open the American market, they generously did so for all their friends as well; and just as the British kids throughout the country were ready to embrace Gerry and the Pacemakers simply because they came from Liverpool as well, so were the American kids, desperately looking for more stylistically similar 45"s to put up next to their copies of 'I Want To Hold Your Hand' and 'She Loves You'. There was one catch, though: the band had to

write its own songs — covering ‘Maybellene’ just wouldn’t do the trick. And, much to Gerry Marsden’s honor, he actually committed to the effort, sometimes on his own, sometimes aided by other guys in the band.

In fact, they scored big on their very first try, with ‘Don’t Let The Sun Catch You Crying’, a soulful ballad which was first donated to Louise Cordet, a small-scale pop singer who accompanied the Beatles and the Pacemakers on some of their UK tours. [Cordet’s version](#), recorded on Decca, did not take off — she was hardly an expressive singer, and Decca’s production, with brass, strings, and piano all hitting on each other, was all over the place and simply too much — so the Pacemakers decided to take a stab at it themselves, and with George Martin keeping the brass section in strict check and taming the orchestration down to a more chamber-like sound, the result was far more palatable, giving the band not just another hit (though not another #1), but, most importantly, an *American* hit. Now they could officially join the Mop Tops in their looting and pillaging spree around the world, even while still clinging to the proverbial coattails.

Ironically, there is nothing particularly good about ‘Don’t Let The Sun Catch You Crying’. For all its popularity, it sounds just like another run-of-the-mill pop ballad from its time — no interesting chord changes, no particularly gripping twists in the slightly bluesy vocal melody, and a rather clumsy bridge section with corny lines like "we know that crying’s not a bad thing". But Marsden and Co. did hit upon an important vibe there which the kids could not at all experience from the Beatles: a note of friendly, intimate, caressing *compassion*. It was arguably one of the first, and one of the *very* few, British Invasion hits targeted — perhaps unintentionally — at the sensitive spots of the female audience. Like a friendly consolation for the poor, broken-hearted girl who has just fainted at a Beatles show while realizing that she can never, ever take a place in the heart of Ringo Starr — let alone John Lennon — and is in desperate need of at least a friendly hug. ‘Don’t Let The Sun Catch You Crying’ is precisely that kind of hug; and, for the record, the Beatles pretty much *never* gave a proper hug to the kids — heck, I think Paul McCartney gave a bigger hug to the parents (with ‘She’s Leaving Home’), and his first heartfelt inclusion of the female perspective did not arrive until ‘Another Day’.

That said, for a bona fide Merseybeat pop-rock band to make headlines with slow sentimental ballads was not the cool thing to do in 1964, even if it did temporarily secure the Pacemakers’ position in the brand new order of young British Knights of the Rock’n’Roll Table. So for their next single the band properly picked up the pace. ‘It’s Gonna Be Alright’, with its frenetic tempo, could be seen as their response to ‘Can’t Buy Me Love’, but the actual vibe, generated by its repetitive chorus, is a bit closer to ‘It Won’t Be Long’ — and, perhaps, the most unusual thing about this speedy rocker is that it is fully acoustic, which, once again, agrees well with the soft consolation message of the song. It is essentially like a sequel to ‘Don’t Let The

Sun', with the suave and courteous gentleman daring to make a more active move on his passion while still concentrating on her psychological comfort... and this time, there are actual *hooks* in the song! Repetitive or not, the "it's gonna be alright, alright, alright" chorus sounds extremely natural — she's in hysterics, he's matching her perturbed emotional state, and together, of course, they'll sort it out. It's a damn good song this time around, finding interesting musical moves to match the message. And, just for the record because I'm a sucker for musical quotations, that line about "never thought I'd find a girl like you" in the bridge section would stick around long enough to be almost directly quoted, melody and all, as "know I'll never find a girl like you" in 'She's The One' by the Ramones — clearly not a coincidence. *Now* we know what inspired Mr. Jeffrey Hyman to take up the drum kit in 1964.

Now that they had followed the Beatles across the Atlantic, and now that they could successfully shadow them with inferior but working hits of their own, what was the next logical step? Right-o. I have never seen anything other than a short trailer for *Ferry Cross The Mersey*, a movie which, unlike *A Hard Day's Night*, is hardly likely to get its own Criterion Collection release any time soon, but even the trailer is enough to see that the proportional relation between the two movies is pretty adequate to the proportional relation between the two bands in general (and pardon me for sounding «lookist», but there is something distinctly disquieting about watching Gerry and the Pacemakers as objects of sex appeal; I could probably see myself as a girl hunting for a lock of Ringo Starr's hair, but come on, Freddie Marsden? he looks like a goddamn member of Parliament!). As hungry as I can be for that time period, I do believe that one can safely draw the line here and assume that a movie clone of *A Hard Day's Night* will probably add very little to the general perspective.

The *soundtrack*, however, is a whole other matter: it is almost unquestionably the single best album that Gerry and the Pacemakers ever put out — which, come to think of it, is not surprising at all, as it is now a matter of general consensus that the soundtrack for **A Hard Day's Night**, held in far stronger respect than the corresponding movie, was the pinnacle of the Beatles' early period, so it would be unwise to expect anything other from Gerry and the Pacemakers; and given that they would not really go on to have a successful anything-other-than-early period, this automatically makes **Ferry Cross The Mersey** their one and only LP worth listening to from top to bottom... well, *mostly*.

The record comes in two amusingly different versions: both the US and UK variants feature nine original compositions written and recorded by the Pacemakers, but the remaining three songs, all performed by different artists who appear in the movie, stylistically vary across the two releases — the US version presents three rock'n'roll performances by little-known one-hit or no-hit wonders ('I Gotta Woman' by the Black Knights, 'Shake A Tail Feather' by Earl Royce, 'Why Don't You

Love Me' by the Blackwells), while the UK version selects the softer alternatives, giving us the folk-pop serenade 'I Love You Too' by the Fourmost; the latest sentimental hit from Cilla Black, 'Is It Love'; and a wittily titled instrumental called 'All Quiet On The Mersey Front' and credited to The George Martin Orchestra — I was afraid it was going to be something completely mushy, but you can at least tap your toe to this thing... and it would probably make a great accompaniment to a silent weather channel (unless it already has, because why the hell did this association spring into my mind in the first place? Must be all these damn echoey «Eurostrings»).

Anyway, we're not here to talk about that, we're here to see the progression made by Gerry and the Pacemakers. And there it is! The album is bookmarked with two of their best songs — 'It's Gonna Be Alright', which was used in the movie, and the title track, a slow, meditative, heartfelt anthem to the band's natural habitat. Lyrically, it probably paints a somewhat exaggerated portrait of Liverpool ("people around every corner / they seem to smile and say / we don't care what your name is boy / we'll never turn you away" — well, maybe if you are Gerry Marsden they won't), but musically, it goes for an epic feel at a time when few Merseybeat bands, certainly not the Beatles, dared to go for an epic feel, possibly at the risk of coming across as too corny. It's a genuine risk, of course, but with this particular track, the Marsdens get it right, and Martin's slightly oscillating strings and woodwinds even give it a bit of a mystical feel.

Most of the other stuff is not as memorable, but generally fun. 'Why Oh Why' is a punchy and catchy pop-rocker (finally, with a good scream and electric guitar solo and shit! and Les Maguire even quotes 'What'd I Say' on the piano! fun!); 'Fall In Love' is a cute old-fashioned skiffle tune on which Maguire substitutes the required banjo for fast-'n'-furious piano rolls to cool effect; 'Think About Love' is... uh, another pop-rocker with the word "love" in the title; 'She's The Only Girl For Me' is the band's moody-melancholic answer to 'Things We Said Today' which could have benefited from a proper piano solo, rather than just the enticing minor chords at the beginning and end; and there is no need to list all the other songs, because I feel like I've pretty much run out of things to say.

Positive reactions aside, **Ferry Cross The Mersey** is still best used as a punching bag for **A Hard Day's Night**, just to visualize clearly and transparently what it is that separates the mediocre pop sound of 1964 from the great pop sound of 1964 — but if, for instance, one thing that worries you about the early Beatles is their lack of vulnerability and overflow of cocky self-confidence (which *can* be a problem, especially in our deeply sensitive times), **Ferry Cross The Mersey** could be just the very antidote you need. In each and every one of these songs, Gerry Marsden pushes his «I'm really a nice guy» agenda over and over and over, which, in my (and probably most of Gerry's contemporaries') opinion, usually works against

Only Solitaire

Artist: *Gerry And The Pacemakers*

Album: *Ferry Cross The Mersey (1965)*

George Starostin's Reviews

the songs' atmospheric appeal — but he *is* a nice guy, actually capable of taking into consideration the feelings of the girls he is falling for, not all that "if I give my heart to you, I must be sure from the very start that you would love me more than her" bullshit (because you *do* have to prove your qualifications, little girl, before Mr. John Lennon is ready to sign that lease on his heart). Life's tough, though — great music tends to be written by assholes, not nice guys. So give the nice guys a chance, spin this record once or twice, and then plunge back into the emotional hell of the bad boys.

