

# JOHNNY KIDD & THE PIRATES



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1959-1966</i>	<i>Early rock'n'roll</i>	<i><a href="#">Please Don't Touch (1959)</a></i>

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*Only Solitaire*

Artist: *Johnny Kidd & The Pirates*

Years: *1959-1960*

George Starostin's Reviews

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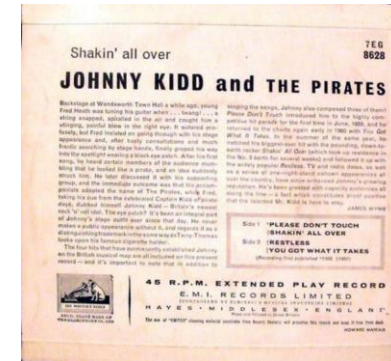
- [Shakin' All Over](#) (1960)



# SHAKIN' ALL OVER

Compilation released: **V** **A** **L** **U** **E** **More info:**

**1960** **3** **3** **3** **3** **3**  



**Tracks:** 1) **Please Don't Touch**; 2) **Shakin' All Over**; 3) Restless; 4) You Got What It Takes; 5\*) Growl; 6\*) If You Were The Only Girl In The World; 7\*) Longin' Lips; 8\*) Yes Sir, That's My Baby; 9\*) Restless; 10\*) Magic Of Love; 11\*) Linda Lu; 12\*) Let's Talk About Us.

## REVIEW

The best of all of Britain's rock'n'roll bands in the pre-Beatles era was so bloody awesome that they never got the chance to put out even one measly LP — the best deal they ever got was a four-song EP, released at the tail end of 1960 and containing two of their best known hits plus two more obscure numbers. Since then, the Pirates' legacy has been properly taken care of on an assortment of compilations, but since most of these cover the band's entire career, over which they went through at least several different lineups, it makes sense to put up some delimiters — and thus bear with me as I make up my own personal **Shakin' All Over**, consisting of 12 A- and B-sides the Pirates put under their belts from 1959 to early 1961.

Not every one of these was great, but at their best, the Pirates were literally the *only* British band at the time to borrow from their overseas' partners not just the fun-and-fancy-free attitude of rock'n'roll, but also its gritty and menacing spirit. And not just borrow, but actually *amplify*. Without exaggeration, I am ready to state that the first ten seconds of 'Please Don't Touch', the Pirates' maiden voyage single, are eligible for the status of the most tense, paranoid, creepy-crawly emotional blast of the year 1959; maybe some contemporary Chicago blues or Link Wray could compare, but certainly not any contemporary «pure» rock'n'roll. The almost proto-metallic chug of the bass / rhythm guitar couple, combined with the echoey, robotic, repetitive background mantra of "don't you touch me baby 'cause I'm shakin' so much" seems almost eerily



prescient of *Psycho* (still a few months away), so much so that when Johnny's deep lead vocals come in — "well there ain't no other woman that makes me feel this way..." — it actually produces a relieving effect, like, OK, this is going to be a love song after all. Yet the lyrics are still ambiguous — the more attention you pay to them, the more they sound like a piece of poetry out of Norman Bates' scrapbook. *Please don't touch, I shake so much.*

Of course, rummaging in our memories through all the major American rock'n'roll hits of the Fifties will make us realize that their protagonists weren't *always* bold sexual predators: fear and confusion at the sight and smell of the opposite sex is quite a frequent topic as well ('All Shook Up', etc.). But with this arrangement of 'Please Don't Touch', the Pirates hit a much deeper nerve and a much more volcanic type of soil: this is the kind of sound that leads to logical continuation not in the form of the Beatles and maybe not even in the form of the Stones, but rather, through the mediation of the Who, culminates in the hellish insanity of the Stooges — there's a fairly straight line leading from 'Please Don't Touch' to the likes of 'TV Eye', even if, due to the overall infancy of rock music in 1959, it is easy as pie to miss it.

It then took the band about a year to improve on their invention. Already the B-side to 'Please Don't Touch', another original rocker named 'Growl', is a bit less exciting, though the band's basic sonic rules remain the same: frenzied proto-punkish twin bass / rhythm attack, mechanical backing vocals from the shadows, and Johnny's pleasantly insinuating gentleman-pirate lead delivering the song's main hook (in this case, the sultry sexy panther purr of the title). However, the backing vocals are much too cheerful and the bassline is much too much generic boogie (lead guitarist Alan Caddy does manage to squeeze in an excellent lilting solo).

The second single was far more disappointing: 'If You Were The Only Girl In The World', credited to «Johnny Kidd with Chorus and Orchestra», was a slow sentimental waltz which nicely showcased Johnny's moderately powerful singing voice but did little else — and 'Feelin', the B-side, was way too much of a blatant rewrite of 'Please Don't Touch', except that "you do it to me baby, you do it all the time" delivered in the same ghostly-stern tone just doesn't cut it anywhere as efficiently as it did the first time. Then came the cover of Marv Johnson's 'You Got What It Takes', which was just an OK British cover of a classic Motown hit, and its B-side, 'Longin' Lips', which bordered on pure vaudeville, even if it was pretty fast and featured another first-rate, high-ringin', Nashville-influenced guitar solo. None of these songs are bad, but next to 'Please Don't Touch', there just wasn't anything particularly special about them.

And then, sometime in mid-1960, the Pirates hit the jackpot: 'Shakin' All Over' is everything that 'Feelin' tried to be but failed: faithfully preserving the paranoid, girl-fearin' spirit of the first single, but completely ditching the backup vocals,

coming up with a fully original and startlingly unpredictable melody, and topping it all with another fine guitar lead, this time by fresh new addition Joe Moretti (who also, incidentally, played lead on Vince Taylor's 'Brand New Cadillac', yet another lonesome grizzly classic from Britain's early rock'n'roll era). With 'Please Don't Touch', lightning had struck by the song's eighth second; in the case of 'Shakin' All Over', it strikes by its second, because the song is really all about its opening riff — like a six shooter blast from Clint Eastwood's gun or something, it puts you head face in the dirt, and then the bass and rhythm guitar just do a little skeletal tap dance on your sorry remains. The «shakey» feel of the verse melody contrasts brilliantly with the stop-and-start punch of the chorus, while the fairly tricky (for their age) time changes make the song barely danceable. Little wonder that the Who adored it so much — the punch, the chaos, the stuttering, the room for improvisation, it was *the* perfect song for them to cover; but as great as their live performances of it have always been, it says a lot about the Pirates that the original version still retains its own inimitable charm, and has not at all been rendered obsolete by Townshend and company's reinvention.

Unfortunately, while lightning may and does indeed strike twice, a third feat of the same caliber evaded the Pirates. For their next single, they repeated the mistake of 'Feelin': 'Restless' is not a bad rock'n'roll number, but it tries much too hard to repeat the success of 'Shakin' All Over', borrowing but smoothing out the former's rhythmic structure and ultimately sounding too much like rehashed formula than genuine inspiration. When this did not work, they followed it up with 'Linda Lu', a novelty blues-rock number which sounds like a Jimmy Reed song crossed with vaudeville exuberance — eminently forgettable and melodically inferior to the B-side, a cover of Otis Blackwell's 'Let's Talk About Us' which, alas, is also negligible next to Jerry Lee Lewis' version. Damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Still, do not get me wrong: even at their worst, the Pirates still got through with a swell sense of humor, swagger, charisma, and solid musical chops. It is simply that next to 'Please Don't Touch', a song so cool that even Motörhead could not make it cooler, and 'Shakin' All Over', a song so epic that even the Who simply made it epic in a different way, all this other stuff just seems trivial in comparison. Even today, there is a mystique and a threat to this kind of sound which keeps the songs squarely on the Devil's personal shelf; and to have had such an achievement in the innocent days of 1959-60 is a feat reserved for very few artists — so drink up, me 'earties.

