

MANFRED MANN



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1963-1969</i>	<i>Classic pop-rock</i>	<i>Mighty Quinn (1968)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *Manfred Mann*

Years: *1963-1964*

George Starostin's Reviews

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THE FIVE FACES OF MANFRED MANN

Album released:

Sep. 11, 1964

V A L U E
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More info:



Tracks: 1) Smokestack Lightning; 2) Don't Ask Me What I Say; 3) Sack O'Woe; 4) What You Gonna Do; 5) Hoochie Coochie; 6) I'm Your Kingpin; 7) Down The Road Apiece; 8) I've Got My Mojo Working; 9) It's Gonna Work Out Fine; 10) Mr. Anello; 11) Untie Me; 12) Bring It To Jerome; 13) Without You; 14) You've Got To Take It; 15*) Why Should We Not; 16*) Brother Jack; 17*) Cock-A-Hoop; 18*) Now You're Needing Me; 19*) 5-4-3-2-1; 20*) Hubble Bubble; 21*) Do Wah Diddy Diddy; 22*) Sha La La; 23*) John Hardy.

REVIEW

There were some mighty strong similarities between Manfred Mann, the young South African keyboard player who had allegedly emigrated to the UK in 1961 because of his strong anti-apartheid feelings, and Alexis Korner, the «Godfather of British R&B» whose Blues Incorporated turned into a launch platform for a bunch of classic British bands. Both Mann and Korner shared a deep passion for all forms of African-American music, considering it naturally superior to popular white music of their times. Both had a somewhat «academic» attitude to this music, valuing its very structure and language above its potentially anti-social, rebellious spirit. Both were also interested in the jazz roots and influences of R&B (Mann actually wrote for the UK periodical *Jazz News* before embarking on a full-time musical career), which certainly distinguished them from scruffy «amateur» bands, too lazy or too indifferent to add the «intellectual-istic» jazz idiom to their Chuck Berry- and/or Muddy Waters-based repertoire.



Yet there was also one big difference between Mann and Korner, a difference more significant than their ethnic background or their musical instrument preferences. Regardless of how serious, knowledgeable, and well-trained Mann could be in his chosen line of work, he also wanted to be a *star*. You know — maybe someday your name will be in lights, saying Manfred S. Mann tonight, and so on. Like Korner, Mann was not a virtuoso player on his instrument of choice, nor was he a genius of composition. But he did have a good ear for pop hooks, and did not consider himself above groping for that proverbial «lowest common denominator» when it came to the task of conquering popular attention.

Out of this attitude — looking for a middle ground between intellectualism and populism — arose Manfred Mann, one of the more unique but also more, shall we say, «morally questionable» playing outfits of the British Invasion. Manfred's chosen henchmen were definitely no slouches: drummer Mike Hugg was also a skilled vibraphone player, guitarist Mike Vickers doubled on flute or on sax when the situation called for it, and lead singer Paul Jones had a naughty, jagged-nasal tone to his voice, allowing him to rival Mick Jagger or Eric Burdon when it came to flashing that arrogant masculinity without which all of your precious R&B quickly goes into «diet» mode. (The «fifth face» of the band was bassist Tom McGuinness, who, according to his own recollections, was actually welcomed into the band as a replacement for earlier player Dave Richmond because the latter refused to simplify his playing style for the band's pop records!). But when you take your first listen to the kind of material that the band put out in its earliest days — from around mid-'63 to mid-'64 — you are most certainly going to wonder what the hell they needed all that talent for.

The band's first single was completely instrumental, but also made it fairly clear that they were not out there to steal the Shadows' thunder. 'Why Should We Not?' was a slow, somber, Western-influenced waltz with a repetitive sax theme (only replaced by Jones' harmonica during a few bars), while the B-side was an instrumental cover of the famous French kiddie song 'Frère Jacques', whose potentially multi-part vocal harmonies were also adapted for a sax / harmonica duet. The main thing uniting both tracks was the concept of a HAMMER-HOOK, repetitively and monotonously screwed into your head for two minutes and twenty seconds each — it was not even instrumental inventiveness or skill, more like an experiment in vamping around something simple and stupid and seeing what would happen. So much for *Jazz News*.

Much to the band's surprise (I reckon), nothing did: the record flopped. They quickly followed it up with something that actually had vocals: the «original» composition 'Cock-A-Hoop', which took the Bo Diddley rhythm and Bo Diddley attitude, smoothed over Bo Diddley's «tribal» beat, and brought the vocal harmonies more in line with the trendy Merseybeat sound. The B-side was 'Now You're Needing Me', a full-fledged exercise in writing a catchy Merseybeat pop song that comes across

as incredibly childish and silly, with Paul Jones sounding more like a clueless moron than an emotionally overwhelmed romantic hero or a triumphant, dominant type. So, unsurprisingly, that second castle, too, sank into the swamp.

The band struck gold when, in a lucky turn of fortune, they were approached to write the theme song for *Ready, Steady, Go!* They came up with something not particularly original, another smoothed-over and poppified take on a wild R&B groove, but they did throw in a plugin for themselves ("uh huh... it was the MANFREDs!"), and the popularity of the program inevitably resulted in the popularity of the title theme — giving them their first proper entry on the charts, and a vague idea of where to go from here. After one more mini-failure with 'Hubble Bubble (Toil And Trouble)', another sanitized R&B groove whose deeply artistic intention — to merge the rituals of Shakespearian witches with those of African-American musical shamans, I'd say — went somewhere in the direction of nowhere, they finally hit the jackpot.

If the Devil himself had made me a deal, offering me the position of band leader in a professional and intelligent music band of the highest caliber, but at the cost of having my most popular and best remembered recording being a song called 'Do Wah Diddy Diddy'... well, I can't make any promises, but I would at least have hesitated. It is a fun little ditty, yes it is, particularly in [the original version by the Exciters](#), sounding more exciting indeed when done by a cutesy-adorable girl group. But in the hands of a British R&B group, and sung by a singer whose preferred attitude of choice is anything *but* pure optimistic exuberance, it comes across as inadequate and, if the term applies here at all, as unconvincing — though, granted, the British public did not share this opinion in the slightest, sending the single all the way to the top of the charts and ensuring Manfred Mann's future once and for all. Of course, Mann never forgot to capitalize on this success, following it with the Shirelles' 'Sha La La', stylistically, lyrically, and atmospherically as close to 'Do Wah Diddy' as possible.

And now, finally we come around to the album itself: **The Five Faces Of Manfred Mann**. Given the band's hit record, young British fans were probably expecting an even larger collection of novelty pop songs, innocently thinking that the title of the LP directly referred to the five band members pictured on the album cover and nothing else. If that was ever the case, they were in for a big surprise — because in actual actuality, the title should have been understood metaphorically, referring rather to the impressive stylistic variety of the music inside the sleeve. Maybe the number five should not be taken too literally, but just for the fun of it let us indeed list Chicago blues ('Smokestack Lightning', 'Hoochie Coochie Man'), rock and roll (Chuck Berry's 'Down The Road Apiece'), soulful R&B ('It's Gonna Work Out Fine', 'Untie Me'), Motown pop ('Don't Ask Me What I Say'), and even jazz (Cannonball Adderley's 'Sack O' Woe').

Not a single song on the LP — not one! — could be counted as catchy novelty pop, even if the US edition of the LP, retitled

The Manfred Mann Album, did the dirty deed by shaving off three tracks and replacing them with ‘Do Wah Diddy Diddy’. This gesture gave Manfred Mann a pretty unique status among their UK brethren — arguably, they became the first British band to position themselves as having two distinct careers: a «populist» one, with silly lightweight singles to bring in fame and fortune, and a «serious» one, with LPs oriented at deeper and more demanding music lovers. And on both fronts, they would trump the competition — the Populist Manfred Mann would sound seductively cheaper and dumber than any pop-based band, while the Serious Manfred Mann would display more diversity and skill than such unwashed ragamuffins as the Stones, the Animals, and the Yardbirds.

Did it actually work? This is where opinions may differ. In mine, **The Five Faces Of Manfred Mann** is generally a rather *boring* album. Their covers of Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf, expertly played and professionally recorded as they are, detract rather than add to the danger and wildness of the originals; arguably the best thing about them is Paul Jones’ voice, and even that one holds a bland-ish middle ground between the sly devilishness of a young Mick Jagger and the burly, aggressive punch of an angry Eric Burdon. ‘Down The Road Apiece’, a song that used to be a fun party number in its early Amos Milburn days, is played strictly and stiffly, buttoned all the way to the top — for comparison, check out the sloppier, livelier, faster, more aggressive Stones version that actually breathed the life back into the song. Same goes for Bo Diddley’s ‘Bring It To Jerome’, whose swagger is toned down and gentrified quite significantly.

In the area of original songwriting, the band also shows clear (and sometimes dishonest) deficiencies. ‘Don’t Ask Me What I Say’, credited to Jones, is a transparent rip-off from Holland-Dozier-Holland’s ‘Can I Get A Witness’, despite some tweaks to the vocal melody; surprisingly, they also used more or less the same keyboard riff as the base for the slightly better ‘I’m Your Kingpin’, a darker, more psychotic number spiced up by a spooky vibe solo and equally spooky echoey counterpoints from Jones’ harmonica and Vickers’ sax (also, Mann yields probably his best solo piano part at the end, finally revealing his post-bop jazz influences). A couple other tunes are less clearly identified as explicit rip-offs, but still sound like tributes to their betters: ‘Without You’, for instance, is a conscious attempt to write a creepy blues tune in the style of Howlin’ Wolf — though we have to give significant credit to Vickers for that flute break in the middle, which sounds peculiarly like an early predecessor to Ian Anderson’s flute-playing style in Jethro Tull (and then Hugg immediately follows it with a few bars of the vibraphone, giving us a completely fresh take on a blues-rock solo for mid-1964).

Much can be said in defense of **Five Faces**, the most serious argument probably being that no other album released in 1964 can clearly count as its superior stylistic equivalent. But in the end, it all comes down to just how much you enjoy this

stuff on a gut level, and my own guts have always remained generally indifferent to its vibes. It might easily appeal to those who like their pop music tight, disciplined, well-rehearsed, and cleanly recorded — but as a rule, these qualities arrive hand-in-hand with sterility and sanitation, which is the last thing I expect from my rock and roll and my R&B. When you play **Five Faces** next to the Rolling Stones' self-titled debut — both albums share at least four out of the five styles that were name-checked above — you understand that the Stones *probably* could not include something like 'Sack O' Woe' on their record (though I would think that neither Charlie nor Bill, coming from jazz backgrounds, would have minded), but when it came to actually capturing the provocative and ambiguous spirits of those rock'n'roll and R&B standards, Jagger, Richards, and Jones had a natural, God-given advantage over the Manfreds.

Ultimately, the album is an artistic disaster, and while some retrospective reviewers (like the respectable Bruce Eder in the All-Music Guide) invite us to give it a fair reassessment, I would personally shudder to live in an epoch in which **The Five Faces Of Manfred Mann** would be seen as a more important and artistically valid cultural artefact than **The Rolling Stones** — though, unfortunately, I would hardly have a choice in the matter.

