

THE SEARCHERS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1963-1988</i>	<i>Classic pop-rock</i>	<i>This Empty Place (1964)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Searchers*

Years: *1963-1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

Page contents:

- [Meet The Searchers](#) (1963)
- [Sugar & Spice](#) (1963)
- [IT'S THE SEARCHERS](#) (1964)
- [Sounds Like Searchers](#) (1965)



MEET THE SEARCHERS

Album released:

V A L U E

August 1963

3 2 3 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) *Sweets For My Sweet*; 2) *Alright*; 3) *Love Potion No. 9*; 4) *Farmer John*; 5) *Stand By Me*; 6) *Money*; 7) *Da Doo Ron Ron*; 8) *Ain't Gonna Kiss Ya*; 9) *Since You Broke My Heart*; 10) *Tricky Dicky*; 11) *Where Have All The Flowers Gone*; 12) *Twist And Shout*.

REVIEW

There's your big difference between the Beatles and the Searchers right from the start. The Beatles' first single — and their second, and their third, and so on... — was a completely original song written by the band members themselves; not a great song, but a decent foundation upon which they could and would quickly improve. The Searchers' first single was a Drifters cover — and even if 'Sweets For My Sweet' was unquestionably a better song than 'Love Me Do', ensuring a formal victory ('Love Me Do' peaked at #17, whereas 'Sweets' went straight to the top of the charts), it also predetermined the band's career: never would they properly make it as independent songwriters, and that meant that as of 1963, the band was doomed to, at best, 2-3 years of fame and success.

Of course, this should not detract from the fact that of the many groups to emerge from the Liverpool scene along with the Beatles, the Searchers were the very best (no offense to such nice lads as the Merseybeats and Gerry and the Pacemakers). Even a brief listen to what they did with 'Sweets For My Sweet' should be convincing. Replacing the quiet piano backing of the Drifters' song with arpeggiated electric rhythm guitar and laying on a thick bassline, they turned the tune into a Merseybeat anthem that preserved the sweetness and tenderness of the original (the



band faithfully reproduces the honey-like falsetto harmonies of the Drifters) while endowing it with extra toughness and power provided by the energetic onslaught of the rhythm section — drummer Chris Curtis, in particular, gets busy filling up most of the empty space, possibly inspired by Ringo and probably foreshadowing the arrival of Keith Moon next year.

That said, as of late 1963 the Searchers were still searching. Most of the material covered here is the same American R&B and rock'n'roll that the Beatles were doing, and the band just cannot provide the same level of passion and energy. They did put their own 'Money' on record before the Beatles, it's true, and Tony Jackson delivers the lyrics with quite a bit of nasal arrogance and defiance, but when you bring on John Lennon with his primal vibe, Tony is immediately dethroned — not to mention that the Beatles' arrangement, with parallel guitar and piano tracks, is juicier and mightier than the Searchers' competent, but amateurish guitar-only performance. The decision to end the record with 'Twist And Shout', the exact same track that also bookmarked **Please Please Me**, is even harder to comprehend — again, Jackson is thin and insecure next to John, and the entire performance must have felt like a simple fan tribute even back then, let alone now.

The band fares slightly better on lighter, jokier pop-rock numbers like Don and Dewey's 'Farmer John' (which they also end up «merseyfying» with extra whoah-yeah uh-uh-uh's) and Richie Barrett's 'Tricky Dicky'; the latter was actually penned by Leiber and Stoller, and they also do their 'Love Potion No. 9', originally recorded by the Clovers. Ironically, when that song was released upon the American market a year later, it became the Searchers' one and only Top Ten hit on the US charts — God works in mysterious ways indeed. Admittedly, it is true that into this bit of comic vaudeville about a voodoo spell gone horribly wrong the Searchers somehow managed to mix a bit of melancholic sadness, making better use of its Am and Dm chords than the Clovers — in their hands, it became more of an 'I'm A Loser'-type personal anthem — but why this approach struck such a particular chord with American audiences is anybody's guess.

Anyway, even if these novelty tunes suit the Searchers' vibe better than the brawny braggardly rock'n'roll stuff, it is still amusing that only one of the songs on here really nails the style for which the band would soon become famous — Pete Seeger's 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone'. Forget Pete, forget Peter, Paul and Mary, forget Joan Baez and the Kingston Trio — the intertwined guitar playing of Mike Pender and John McNally de-solemnifies and colorizes the somber nostalgic folk anthem, presaging the soon-to-come sound of the Byrds, though, in the absence of 12-string guitar jangle, the sound is still much closer to the generic Merseybeat of 1963. *This*, however, is the type of music that the Beatles had not claimed for their own, and it is a good thing for us that the Searchers quickly realized it, too.

A bit of that sound can also be heard on the B-side to 'Sweets For My Sweet', not included on the original album but added

as a bonus track on subsequent CD releases: 'It's All Been A Dream' is the band's only self-penned tune from that era (credited to Chris Curtis, the drummer), and although in its form and essence it seems to be just a regular dreamy romantic Merseybeat pop ballad, the guitar jangle and the tender harmonies are somewhat close in execution to the style of 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone'. It is actually strange that they did not attempt to put any more original material on this LP or, for that matter, the next two LPs as well — the song is, at the very least, on the level with whatever most of their Liverpool contemporaries, Beatles excluded, were producing at the time.

Still, despite the lack of confidence, **Meet The Searchers** is at least fully competent from a technical standpoint. Produced in true stereo by Pye's resident producer Tony Hatch, played and sung by good musicians and singers who were not *nearly* as tame as most of the crowds around them, very few of these tracks leave you with a feeling of misery and pity (except for 'Money' and 'Twist And Shout' if you already know your Beatles, and whoever even in 1963 would know his Searchers before knowing his Beatles?). And in retrospect, knowing that the Searchers would never go to truly great heights, **Meet The Searchers** does not disappoint nearly as much as, say, the Kinks' debut — when you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose, and when you actually got a little, who's gonna roast you for the times when you got nothing?





SUGAR & SPICE

Album released:

Oct. 16, 1963

V A L U E

3 3 3 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) Sugar And Spice; 2) Don't You Know; 3) Some Other Guy; 4) One Of These Days; 5) Listen To Me; 6) Unhappy Girls; 7) Ain't That Just Like Me; 8) Oh My Lover; 9) Saints And Searchers; 10) Cherry Stones; 11) **All My Sorrows**; 12) Hungry For Love.

REVIEW

The story behind 'Sugar & Spice' (the song) is funny: apparently Tony Hatch, the band's producer, had decided that the boys desperately needed to repeat the success of 'Sweets For My Sweet', so he wrote a melodically and thematically similar song himself and pitched it to the lads under the pen name of «Fred Nightingale», wary that they might reject it otherwise. Allegedly the Searchers still hated the song, but went on to record it anyway — and got a solid #2 hit right below the Beatles' 'I Want To Hold Your Hand'. *Why* they hated it is a question, but probably because it was really reminiscent of the previous hit — right down to the suitably soothing alliterative title — and that was definitely not the right way to go about your career if you wanted to compete with the Beatles. Or maybe because it was far more poppy, with a sentimental guitar melody in place of the «rougher» R&B chords of the Drifters' song. Or maybe they weren't big fans of nursery rhymes. In any case, there is no denying either the song's catchiness or its sappiness.



And «sappy» was something that the Searchers really did not want to associate with themselves too much, given that most of the songs on their second LP are still in the rock'n'roll vein. We got us some Buddy Holly, some Carl Perkins, a little Coasters, even a bit of Ronnie Hawkins, and, of course, 'Some Other Guy', a song that every British beat band was playing at the time (the Beatles included — you can see them rockin' it at the Cavern in just about every Beatles documentary). Are the performances adequate? For the most part. Are they particularly outstanding or memorable? Not any more than the first time around. Once again, the Searchers try to prove to us that they are capable of being tough rock'n'rollers, and once again, if there is anything to laud about all these performances, it is only in the sphere of the boys' vocal harmonies. They stay more coordinated and more in key on 'Some Other Guy' than the Beatles on the **BBC Sessions** (but only because that performance was live — I'm sure that if they did the song in the studio with Martin, the Searchers would be out of a job); they add tons of extra backing vocals to Buddy Holly's 'Don't Cha Know' (not that the song really needs them, but hey, if you got an advantage, you should use it in any context you can, right?); they throw on a rowdy Isley Brothers-style call-and-response coda to 'Ain't That Just Like Me', making the Coasters' joke song more anthemic as a result. None of that is particularly necessary, but hey, at least the boys show us that they are working.

Also, to be fair, at least the song selection, 'Some Other Guy' excluded, is not quite as predictable this time around. With Perkins, for instance, they try out a lesser known title ('Unhappy Girls') rather than 'Blue Suede Shoes' or 'Honey Don't'. Ronnie Hawkins is hardly one of the most covered American artists, either — and neither are the Chiffons ('Oh My Lover'), at least not until George Harrison began ripping them off (heh heh). The most outstanding inclusion, for which I had even to do a bit of research, was '[Cherrystone](#)', an upbeat pop-rock hit from 1959 by the Addrissi Brothers (a former acrobatic duo from Massachusetts!) — but so little known even at the time, apparently, that it was confused by the record makers with the popular song '[Cherry Stones](#)', by John Jerome, and included under that title *and* credited to that composer, so that the poor Addrissi Brothers most certainly never saw one red cent from those sales; as far as I can tell, that particular mistake has not as of yet been corrected in *any* discography source... because, I mean, who cares? It's not the frickin' Beatles or anything.

And once again, just like last time around, there is only one song on the album that properly showcases the Searchers' main strength — beautiful folk harmonies set to pretty ringing folk guitar melodies. This is 'All My Sorrows', which they probably nicked from The Kingston Trio who were the ones to perform the song with this title (rather than the original 'All My Trials', under which it was performed by most of the Greenwich Village artists). The guitar «weave» on this song is quite exquisite, with John McNally's clear acoustic rhythm guitar echoed by Mike Pender's oddly distorted electric arpeggios (I'd swear he is running them through a Leslie cabinet, but apparently this is a bit too early for such trickery), and the whole

Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Searchers*

Album: *Sugar & Spice (1963)*

George Starostin's Reviews

thing has an ethereal-magical aura around it which, of course, you shall never find on «purist» versions. An entire album of this type of sound might have been overkill, but two or three more tunes like this certainly couldn't have hurt — at the expense of, say, the Searchers trying to be the Coasters, an enterprise about as futile for them as trying to be the Marx Brothers, or the Dalton Gang.

Still, once again, this is a fun little record to listen to if you've got nothing better to do. The McNally / Pender guitar duo, in particular, keeps improving, and by the standards of late 1963 proudly holds its own to the Lennon / Harrison sound, at least when it comes to softer and folksier parts of the repertoire. In a way, they could be regarded at that precise time period as sort of a transitional ground between the Beatles and the Shadows — tighter and more attentive to professional musical discipline than the Fab Four, but looser and more rock'n'roll-like than Cliff Richard's homies. This is not necessarily a good thing (because middle ground can be a treacherous territory), and the near-total lack of original songwriting is a serious downside, but they *do* have their own identity even on those early records.

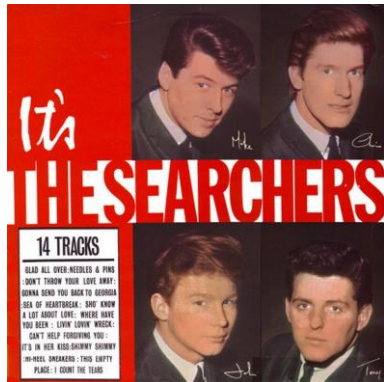


Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Searchers*

Album: *It's The Searchers (1964)*

George Starostin's Reviews



IT'S THE SEARCHERS

Album released:

May 1964

V A L U E
3 3 4 3 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) It's In Her Kiss; 2) Glad All Over; 3) Sea Of Heartbreak; 4) Livin' Lovin' Wreck; 5) Where Have You Been; 6) Shimmy Shimmy; 7) **Needles And Pins**; 8) This Empty Place; 9) Gonna Send You Back To Georgia; 10) I Count The Tears; 11) Hi-Heel Sneakers; 12) Can't Help Forgiving You; 13) Sho' Know A Lot About Love; 14) Don't Throw Your Love Away.

REVIEW

If you feel like the Searchers are subtly mellowing out on their third LP, surreptitiously nudging out good old rock'n'roll in favor of their folk-pop side, then this is very likely to be related to the first big and unpleasant rift within the band, in which bass player — and, once upon a time, primary lead vocalist, too — Tony Jackson found himself pitted against drummer Chris Curtis and, to a lesser extent, lead guitarist Mike Pender. Details can be looked up in biographical sources, but there is a definite correlation between Tony and much, if not most, of the band's harder-rocking material: from this point of view, I could not really argue with Chris that the Searchers excelled far better at the sensitive stuff than at trying to outplay the Beatles or the Stones when it came out to lean and mean rock muscle. It is unfortunate that Tony only got one lead vocal on the album (and far from the best one), or that he left the band soon afterwards... but it may have been for the best, after all.



In any case, **It's The Searchers** is as good as it ever got for this band — which is still not *that* good, but there is no better collection of Searchers tunes to justify the band's appearance on this planet. The most glaring crime is that nobody in the band could still take on any songwriting responsibilities: all the songs are covers, and usually not even obscure ones (or ones written specially for the band) — I suppose that by mid-'64, releasing an LP without a single original track was already known, or at least felt, to represent a soon-to-be-executed death sentence for any of that early generation of British Invasion bands. Yet the Searchers were still rooting for an identity, and while their hazy oscillation between raunchy rock'n'roll and pensive folksiness on the first two records kind of muddled the listeners' senses, **It's The Searchers** almost got it nailed for us. Where the Beatles would largely be about odes to joy and the Stones would be about salacious serenades to sex, the Searchers wanted to become Young Werther and the Sorrow Singers.

It all begins with one of their biggest hits and arguably the song that is still most commonly associated with the Searchers (or, more accurately, it is the Searchers who are most commonly associated with that song) — a cover of 'Needles And Pins', which was a fresh, but very minor hit for Jackie DeShannon, written for her (or *with* her, according to the lady herself) by Sonny Bono and Jack Nitzsche. Honestly speaking, both versions are quite comparable, and Jackie certainly sings the tune with more fire and energy than Mike Pender — the question, of course, being whether the song *requires* fire and energy, or whether it should be delivered with more sadness and melancholia, as befits a chorus that goes "because of all my pride, the tears I gotta hide". That the song became a much bigger hit for the Searchers even in the US is probably due to the fad of British Invasion — it was breaking through at about the same time as 'I Want To Hold Your Hand' — but there is also no denying that, vocals aside, the Searchers also have the upper musical hand: that droning opening electric jangle pretty much creates the blueprint for the Byrds, and from there, for all the folk-rock explosion to follow all the way up to the Beatles' **Rubber Soul** and beyond. McNally and Pender's guitars just walk all over the place, setting a drizzling-rain sound pattern so appropriate for the general atmosphere — and so totally not a concern in DeShannon's version, where Nitzsche just seems worried about getting the basic chord pattern right.

Three months later, 'Needles And Pins' were followed by yet another mega-hit for the band: 'Don't Throw Your Love Away', which once again steals the thunder from an American original, this time by the Orlons, a vocal group from Philly (written for them by professional songwriters). [The Orlons' version](#) is actually quite cool, based on an unusual combination of African percussion and choppy jazzy piano chords; but with electric guitar being so much more in fashion at the time, the Searchers' scratchy, in places almost proto-funky delivery, spiced up with a little reverb, probably gained more attention from the start — and placing Pender so close to the mike must have helped, too (the Orlons, as was so common with

American vocal groups those days, always sound much too distant for any potential effect of intimacy). It is interesting that on the LP, both of these big hits close one of the album's sides rather than open it — as if to stress, somehow, that the Searchers are the modern day poets of Farewell and Goodbye, rather than of Hello and Welcome.

I must say, however, that my personal favorites on the record are not the big hits, but two stylistically close, yet, in a way, substantially deeper covers. On Side A, this is 'Sea Of Heartbreak', originally performed by Don Gibson in a relatively extraverted manner, with a primarily acoustic guitar melody lightly ornamented with quiet, sprinkly piano rolls. In the Searchers' interpretation, the piano (played by their producer Tony Hatch) becomes the dominant instrument and engages in serene, wavy dialog with Pender's lead vocals, while Pender himself delivers the vocal melody in a slightly dazed, shell-shocked state (as probably befits somebody wading through a "sea of heartbreak, lost love and loneliness"). If you listen *very* closely, you will even notice that voice following the piano's octaves — going to bass levels right after the keys, as if imitating the ocean's inescapable pull. The resulting atmosphere, if you give in to it, is haunting and mesmerizing, in a kind of intimately moody manner that nobody in the UK could pull off at the time, not even the Zombies (when it comes to masters of the dark brooding melancholic approach).

On Side B, it gets even better with 'This Empty Place', a Bacharach creation that they probably took away from Dionne Warwick's version. Melodically, I think this is one of the finest songs that Burt ever composed — multiple unpredictable turns and twists in the vocal melody which all make perfect emotional sense. But if anything, the Searchers help the song realize its potential so much fuller than the Warwick version: again, they bring in heavy emphasis on the piano (instead of horns, which actually detract from the deep despair of the song), but the most important thing are these vocal zoops from Curtis (who now takes the lead): "there's an empty (*down*) PLACE (*up*) beside me... when I'm walkin' (*down*) DOWN (*up*) the street...". A minor detail? Perhaps; but with this tiny touch, they add a heavy, depressing aura which was really only hinted at in the original version. Amusingly, the mood and style of the song remind me so much of 'Things We Said Today' that I would not at all be surprised to learn about Paul being subconsciously influenced by this performance — and, interestingly, 'Things We Said Today' is said to have been written by him on vacation sometime in May 1964, precisely the month that **It's The Searchers** was officially released. Anybody know, incidentally, what sorts of records Paul might have taken with him to the Virgin Islands?

As you can already see, all of these songs — the big hits and inventive sleeper gems alike — are united by one major theme: "sadness and tears, they're such bad souvenirs". This is not an exhaustive list (there is also Pomus and Shuman's 'I Count

The Tears', for instance), but still, even with this decisive strategy of forever being associated with seas of heartbreak, the Searchers leave plenty of space open for more optimistic and heart-warming performances — such as their cover of the big Betty Everett hit 'It's In His Kiss (The Shoop Shoop Song)'. The band boldly discards all the shoop shoops, replacing them with a few intro bars of 'Twist And Shout' that weren't there before — you know, just to let you remember that this is still a true beat band you have here, not just a bunch of world-weary depressed romantic losers. However, most of the rocking stuff that follows is no more impressive than it was on the previous records: Timmy Shaw's 'Gonna Send You Back To Georgia' which is absolutely useless next to the Animals version; Carl Perkins' 'Glad All Over' which the Beatles did better on their BBC sessions; and a particularly low point with the cover of the Hollywood Argyles' novelty number 'Sho' Know A Lot About Love' — because this is the kind of song that needs to be weird and humorous, and the Searchers are not that good when it comes to weird and humorous. Too bad it was Tony Jackson's only vocal performance here.

That said, when it comes to judgement, I am willing to forgive a few missteps. An LP consisting of nothing but songs about heartbreak and loss might be tolerable from some big visionary like Neil Young or Lou Reed (then again, even then maybe not...) — the Searchers do the right thing by interspersing the first-rate sad stuff with the fillerish livelier stuff, making it more difficult to bore yourself to death and making the sad songs particularly distinctive against the more common background. Whatever be your or my verdict, it is difficult to argue that the album represents a truly high point for the band: never again would they be this inventive or consistent — and besides, Father Time himself would soon ban them from even the lowest of high ranks for failing to pass the basic songwriter's test.





SOUNDS LIKE SEARCHERS

Album released:

March 1965

V A L U E
2 3 3 1 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) Everybody Come And Clap Your Hands; 2) If I Could Find Someone; 3) Magic Potion; 4) I Don't Want To Go On Without You; 5) Bumble Bee; 6) Something You Got Baby; 7) Let The Good Times Roll; 8) A Tear Fell; 9) Till You Say You'll Be Mine; 10) You Wanna Make Her Happy; 11) Everything You Do; 12) Goodnight Baby; 13*) This Feeling Inside; 14*) Goodbye My Love; 15*) Till I Met You; 16*) **He's Got No Love**; 17*) So Far Away; 18*) When I Get Home.

REVIEW

Tony Jackson left the Searchers in July 1964 and was replaced by Frank Allen, a former member of Cliff Bennett & The Rebel Rousers. Two consequences of this could have been predicted: (a) the Searchers would move to an even softer, folk-poppier sound, losing the faintest traces of «rough edges» they might ever have possessed; (b) Tony Jackson would try to start a solo career, fail at it, and disappear entirely from the musical world, to die sick, drunk, and forgotten at the age of 65 in 2003. In other words, his leaving the band helped nothing and nobody — but then again, had he stayed, it is equally doubtful that the Searchers would have survived the transition into a new musical era.



In discussing the band's fourth album, and their first with Allen, it is always fair game to poke fun at the title — it is almost as if the group members themselves had second thoughts on whether they are still making quintessential Searchers-style music, or are headed somewhere completely different. One thing is for certain: after the generally high quality and subtle

musical innovations of **It's The Searchers**, *this* record is clearly a letdown. The biggest advantage of its predecessor was not even the participation of Tony Jackson and the inclusion of some genuine rock'n'roll numbers like 'Hi-Heel Sneakers'; it was their «jangly» folk-pop formula, represented by such highlights as 'Needles And Pins' and 'Sea Of Heartbreak'. **Sounds Like Searchers** finds no traces of it whatsoever, as if they'd forgotten their principal strength — and this at a time when folk-pop and folk-rock were so clearly on the move, with Dylan, the Byrds, and even the Beatles joining in the revolution.

Instead, most of **Sounds Like Searchers** falls into two categories — slow sentimental balladry and light, fluffy, amicably danceable pop. The very first song is telling already: a cover of Jeff Barry's and Ellie Greenwich's 'Everybody Come Clap Your Hands', a cuddly pop-R&B hybrid party anthem originally recorded by the little-known R&B outfit Moody and the Deltas a year earlier. The original version was heavily tilted toward establishing a rowdy party atmosphere (overdubbed party noises, exuberant harmonies, brass bursts, etc.); the Searchers push it more into the direction of melody, with sharper and cleaner guitar riffs and slightly more intricate vocal harmonies — but Frank Allen's lead vocal comes straight out of a china shop, making me visualize a target audience of 6-year old kids around a Christmas tree. It's all nice and cuddly, and the short, Shadows-inspired electric guitar solo is awesomely melodic, but I'd still take the [original version](#) by the Deltas over this milquetoast cover any day. Surely there might have been a better way to introduce Frank Allen to the LP-buying public, if he makes Tony Jackson sound like Eric Burdon in comparison.

Weird attempts to adapt the «playful R&B» formula to their own ends continue with the first single from the album, a cover of LaVern Baker's 'Bumble Bee' from five years ago. It was one of her «joke songs», like 'Tweedlee Dee' and 'Jim Dandy', but a really fun one as well, and theoretically, there is no sin in a UK band covering a LaVern Baker joke song in March '65, but why put it out as a single? Imagine the Beatles putting out 'Dizzy Miss Lizzie' as the first single off **Help!**, for instance... or, for that matter, having 'You Know My Name (Look Up The Number)' as the A-side and 'Let It Be' as the B-side. (Not that I'd object, of course, but only because the Beatles have the royal right to fuck with their fanbase; the Searchers never earned that right in the first place). What's worse is that the Searchers almost put up a *serious* face when covering the song — LaVern does it in a goofy, vaudevillian way, with her backing band joining in on the fun (in the [original](#), for instance, the guitar riff echoing the chorus of "a bumble bee, an evil bumble bee" is heavily distorted, as if imitating the actual hum of the blasted bumble bee in question; this tiny, but significant detail is totally lost in transition). The Searchers, once again, deliver a tight, well-polished, melodic version, with a cool tremolo guitar part replacing the original vibraphone — but the actual *playfulness* aspect is all but lost. Minor hint: if your band is not known for having any sense of humor, maybe *don't*

make a habit of covering humorous songs by other people?

Meanwhile, the battle for originality seems to be hopelessly lost — by early 1965, when «write your own or die» seems to have been established as an unwritten law for UK bands, we find the Searchers still doing mostly covers, with only three original compositions, all credited to Curtis, found on the LP. They are surprisingly decent: ‘If I Could Find Someone’, in particular, is a touching ballad with some surprising vocal moves (like the emergence of the lonesome, plaintive “...and I love to hear somebody say...” bridge out of the harmony mesh of the “...if I could find someone” chorus — there are distinct echoes of the Beatles’ ‘If I Fell’ here, but mood-wise rather than melody-wise), and ‘You Wanna Make Her Happy’ is a catchy pop serenade with lots of quirky chord changes and a cool little Chet Atkins-influenced country-pop riff used as delimiter in between verses. (The third Curtis original, ‘Everything You Do’, is just a brief rockabilly-style throwaway, but not particularly irritating, either). However, it does feel as if — in accordance with Frank Allen’s complaints in the liner notes — all these songs simply were not given enough gestation time; the arrangements are minimal, the lyrics are fluffy, and the overall feel is that, emotion-wise, all of this stuff is still hopelessly stuck somewhere in 1963.

I don’t even feel like discussing the rest of the covers on the album, because they all suffer from exactly the same problem: most of the songs are good, but it never feels as if there is a real sense of purpose to the Searchers covering them. The best outcome is that they might help one unearth some forgotten goodies — I’d never even heard of Moody and the Deltas, for instance, before listening to this album, or of Lou Johnson, the soul singer who first recorded Bacharach and David’s ‘Magic Potion’ in a [solidly soulful version](#) which makes the Searchers’ one completely expendable. (I have a suspicion they only recorded the song because they’d already done ‘Love Potion No. 9’, so, as well-established experts in love potions, they simply couldn’t pass up on this one). And what did they think to achieve by covering the orchestrated waltz of the Drifters’ ‘I Don’t Want To Go On Without You’? Without a Steve Marriott or a Rod Stewart-type singer in the band, competing with the power of the Atlantic R&B sound on a *vocal* level is a battle that’s lost before it is even started.

In short, while time has helped me to somewhat mellow out — there are really no bad songs on the album, and all the covers are at least formally competent and listenable — **Sounds Like Searchers** still represents the start of a clear (and fairly quick) downward slide for a band that took quite a bit of time to find their special strength, then embarrassingly failed to capitalize on it.

Interestingly enough, the small run of singles that they would release throughout 1965 — available on the remastered CD edition of the album as bonus tracks — does show that the race was not yet completely run. Most of these songs are

originals, and a few show some promising developments, most notably 'He's Got No Love', co-credited to Curtis and Pender — the song is notable for containing much the same little pop riff that Pete Townshend would later use (nick?) for his own 'A Legal Matter', though one could argue that it is, in turn, itself derivative of the Stones' riff for 'The Last Time'. Anyway, that riff is encrusted inside an echoey, reverberating arrangement, with gorgeous harmonies that are but one step away from the baroque-pop explosion of next year. The B-side of the single, 'So Far Away', was recorded in much the same style, but is just a tad weaker because the overall melody is extremely derivative of Buddy Holly (the opening is pretty much pilfered directly from 'Listen To Me'). But then they had to go and spoil it by choosing a Bobby Darin track for their next single — 'When I Get Home' (*not* the Beatles song), which may actually sound a little crisper than the Darin original (at least it's not a Drifters song), yet still completely ditches that proto-psychedelic jangly reverberation of the previous single. In other words, one step forward, one step back, same old muddle again.

