

# TONY SHERIDAN



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1961-2008</i>	<i>Early rock'n'roll</i>	<i><a href="#">Sweet Georgia Brown (1962)</a></i>

---

*Only Solitaire*

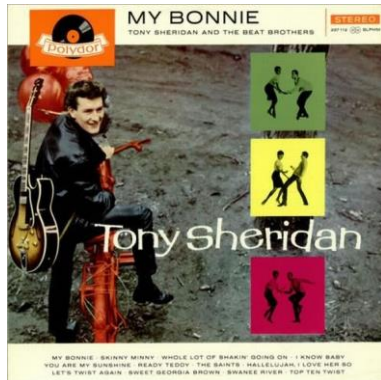
Artist: *Tony Sheridan*

Years: *1961-1964*

George Starostin's Reviews

## **Page contents:**

- [My Bonnie](#) (1962)
- [Just A Little Bit](#) (1964)



## MY BONNIE

Album released:

June 1962

V A L U E  
3 3 3 1 3

More info:



**Tracks:** 1) *My Bonnie*; 2) *Skinny Minny*; 3) *Whole Lot Of Shakin' Going On*; 4) *I Know Baby*; 5) *You Are My Sunshine*; 6) *Ready Teddy*; 7) *The Saints*; 8) *Hallelujah, I Love Her So*; 9) *Let's Twist Again*; 10) *Sweet Georgia Brown*; 11) *Swanee River*; 12) *Top Ten Twist*.

### REVIEW

Although history has ruthlessly ordered Tony Sheridan to occupy his (unforgettable, though!) place as a minor footnote in the story of the Beatles, and although probably the only vocal performance of his to have been heard by millions of people all over the world is 'My Bonnie' — for obvious reasons — this LP, originally only released in Germany (and credited, respectively, to «Tony Sheridan Und Die Beat Brothers»), remains behind as documental proof that those managers who actually saw potential in the man were not completely off their rockers. Sheridan did have a powerful rock'n'roll voice, somewhat reminiscent of Jerry Lee Lewis', a good smatter of charisma, and, most importantly, unlike his far more successful British contemporaries such as Cliff Richard and Billy Fury, all through those «dark rock'n'roll years» of 1960–62 Sheridan remained firmly devoted to genuine rock'n'roll: **My Bonnie**, pretty much alone among all the pop-rock records released in those years, does not feature even a single sentimental ballad. Presumably this is why Sheridan found no luck in his native country in those days, and, unwilling to adapt to the changing standards of the industry (as well as being far too rowdy and uncontrollable in general), spent most of them in Hamburg — meaning that his teaming up with the Beatles was no accident, but a fairly natural union.



The only LP from those early days is perfectly listenable and fairly enjoyable all the way through, but it is a bit of a mess. The Beatles (retitled «The Beat Brothers» for these sessions, since apparently *Beatles* reminded the Germans of a dirty word) are actually featured here only on two tracks — ‘My Bonnie’ and ‘The Saints’, both recorded June 22, 1961 and originally released as a single in October ’61 (although the Beatles later added instrumental backing tracks to Tony’s singing on ‘Sweet Georgia Brown’ and ‘Swanee River’, those later versions are apparently not the ones featured on this LP). The other ten, even if they are still officially credited to «The Beat Brothers», were cut by Tony with a completely different backing band on December 21, 1961. A few other tracks that the Beatles did with Tony remained unreleased for a long time, then surfaced on various Hamburg-era official and unofficial records, and today most fans are familiar with at least ‘Ain’t She Sweet’ and Harrison’s instrumental ‘Cry For A Shadow’ because of their inclusion on the **Anthology** discs — but, for obvious reasons (since Sheridan is not singing on them), they did not make it onto this LP.

Still, chances are that if you ever heard this version of ‘My Bonnie’, you may have been impressed by the quality of Tony’s singing — he is quite a belter, not to mention a trickster as he goes from the deceptively quiet and sentimental intro to the rock’n’roll frenzy of the main verses in an instant (the same trick is later repeated on ‘Swanee River’, though, fortunately, this is as far as Sheridan’s German-funded program of transforming all the old folk songs into rock’n’roll anthems took him). What is not often mentioned is that the maniacal, but tightly controlled guitar break on the song was also played by Sheridan rather than Harrison (allegedly, it was overdubbed from a different take) — this is clearly not George’s style of playing, and I must actually state that at that point, Sheridan was a better rock’n’roll lead guitar player than George, being able to play it faster, tighter, and with more primal rock’n’roll drive (for that matter, speed and fluency were never George’s forte, and it took him some time to come up with his unique playing style that emphasized tone and melody over those qualities). I think it is also Tony on main lead guitar on ‘The Saints’, though here I could be wrong.

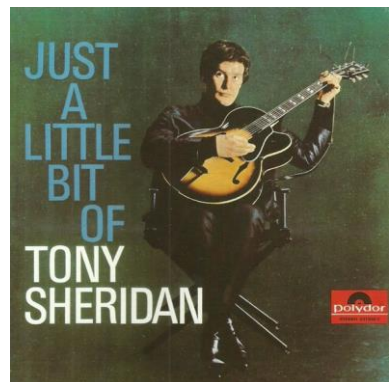
As for the rest of the material, it is just a chunk of Tony’s regular repertoire from the Star Club — some well-known rock’n’roll standards like ‘Ready Teddy’, some numbers taken from Ray Charles’ setlists (Ray was clearly one of Sheridan’s main idols), and a couple of Chubby Checker’s twisting classics to quench the German people’s thirst for the newest dance craze of 1961. Only one track is marked as a Tony Sheridan original, the relatively slow blues ‘I Know Baby’ which feels like an attempt to hybridize the sonic atmosphere of a dark Chicago blues session with the more commercial, Vegas-ier feel of tracks like ‘Fever’ — with Tony himself behaving more like a Howlin’ Wolf on the verses and more like Elvis on the bridge section. It’s a bit weird, though not weird enough to be memorable or anything.

There is nothing particularly special and nothing particularly irritating about the other performances, though it bugs me a bit how much effort and patience it took to find any information on the players for the December 21 session — because the piano player, in particular, *really* stands out from the rest of the band, consistently delivering fabulous performances in the styles of Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnnie Johnson, Floyd Cramer, you name 'em; easily the best piano playing on a pop record to come out of Europe in those years that I have ever had the pleasure of hearing, which almost made me wish the Beatles would have snapped that piano guy as a fifth member of the band before returning back to the UK... and, would you believe it, Brian Epstein actually thought the same — because the piano player, whose name was Roy Young, actually was invited by Brian to join the band, but declined. (Later, he went on to briefly join Cliff Bennett and the Rebel Rousers, but the one spot where people are most likely to have heard his playing is on the first side of David Bowie's **Low**). The guitar and sax leads are quite decent, too, but it is largely the piano parts that make me want to revisit these versions of 'Whole Lot Of Shakin' Going On' (*sic!*) and 'Sweet Georgia Brown'.

To conclude, it may not be a tragedy that Sheridan, at one time regarded as *the* potential British star to break out of the Hamburg training grounds, never advanced beyond this level of quality, professionalism, and recognition — but at the very least, these recordings show that he is quite deserving to be placed in that cozy little mini-pantheon of the early heroes of British rock'n'roll along with Johnny Kidd, Billy Fury, Cliff Richard, etc., a mini-pantheon which by itself looks quite pathetic against the major pantheon of the early heroes of American rock'n'roll but which, after all, also did lay the foundation for the British Invasion.







# JUST A LITTLE BIT

Album released:

1964

V A L U E  
3 2 2 1 2

More info:



**Tracks:** 1) Just A Little Bit; 2) Kansas City; 3) Save The Last Dance For Me; 4) Unchained Melody; 5) Get On The Right Track, Baby; 6) You'd Better Move On; 7) Skinny Minny; 8) Jambalaya; 9) Mary Ann; 10) Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow; 11) My Babe; 12) Sweet Georgia Brown; 13) I Got A Woman.

## REVIEW

Curiosity may not necessarily have killed the cat, but it sure made my life a bit difficult when I tried to hunt down Tony Sheridan's only *other* LP from the 1960s. Called **Just A Little Bit Of Tony Sheridan**, it was released by Polydor some time in 1964 and later reissued under the title of **My Babe** on the Swedish-cum-German Karussell label. Apparently, an official CD version of it does exist (there's an actual picture on Discogs with the Polydor label), but the album is difficult to locate digitally in its original form — some of the tracks may be scattered among all sorts of messy, chaotic compilations bearing the name of Tony Sheridan, and some might even be found credited to «Tony Sheridan and the Beatles», even though they were recorded at a time when the Beatles could only have supported Tony Sheridan out of mercy if he were dying of cancer or something. Anyway, I did my best to assemble what looks to be the correct version of the record from multiple sources (though I still have doubts as to this particular version of 'Sweet Georgia Brown'; apparently Tony cut at least three or four of them in the early Sixties — at least this one is *probably* post-Beatles, since it includes the improvised lines "in Liverpool, she even dared to criticize the Beatles' hair").



The band accompanying Tony on the album is alternately referred to in discographies as «The Beat Brothers» (no, that is *not* an alias for the Beatles!) or, more frequently, as «The Big Six» — in some ways, this large combo from Scotland, which augmented the standard rock band lineup with a brass section (sax and trumpet), might even be more interesting than Tony himself (hey, not a first for the man, right?); for instance, the sax player, Alex Young, was one of the elder brothers in the same extended Young family that included George, Malcolm, and Angus — except *he* actually refused to move to Australia during Scotland's «big freeze» of 1963 (and thus deprived the future Easybeats or the future AC/DC of the opportunity to include a salaried saxophone player). He did move to Hamburg, though, together with the entire band, where they called themselves The Bobby Patrick Big Six and claimed to be big friends with the Beatles (although, truthfully, what British group that played in Hamburg in the early Sixties didn't? Everybody wanted to be friends with the Beatles, especially in retrospect). Regardless, what they definitely did become was big friends with Tony Sheridan, whom they would be backing from approximately 1964 to 1967. (You can read much more about the band in [this long write-up](#) from Nick Warburton, as well as listen to some samples of their own recordings — fairly bland, particularly the limp and by-the-book cover of the Beatles' 'Nowhere Man', but generally listenable).

In any case, returning to Sheridan, it is clear that he made an effort in 1964 to present himself as a rocker-cum-soul man, far more influenced by the American R&B and soul scene than by distilled rock'n'roll. There are still a number of leftovers from the earlier, wilder days, such as a fast-paced, rambunctious 'Jambalaya' inherited from Jerry Lee Lewis rather than Hank Williams or Fats Domino, and another recording of 'Skinny Minny'. But generally, this is soulful R&B all the way — paying homage to the Drifters ('Save The Last Dance For Me'), Arthur Alexander ('You Better Move On'), even the Shirelles ('Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow'), and especially Ray Charles: not only does Tony cover the lesser known 'Mary Ann' from Ray's debut album, but he also goes for a monumental, long-winded 'I Got A Woman' modeled not on the short single version of the song, but on the extended rave version from **At Newport**, together with the slow, «deceptive» intro.

It's actually better than one could think — Sheridan's strong, deep voice had always been his chief asset, and on the whole, he puts it to better use during his Big Six period than in the earliest Hamburg days; he is certainly a more natural crooner than rock'n'roller. But «more natural» does not automatically make you the best of the best, or even outstanding, and there is little in these performances that would suggest an ability to do something interesting, challenging, or even *modern* with that vocal talent. Every single track here, both from a vocal and instrumental perspective, is strictly perfunctory: the kind of performance you might enjoy very much while gobbling down your dinner at B. B. King's Bar & Grill, then spend all your way home in deep thought about what it was that you enjoyed more — the show, or the dinner. At best, memories of one

will be inextricable from memories of the other, the same way that no amount of recorded output and no attempt at a change of image could ever free poor Tony from forever remaining in the status of a footnote to you-know-who.

One concluding observation that came into my mind from playing the original Ray Charles Newport performance of 'I Got A Woman' back-to-back with Tony's interpretation is that of *balance*, and how important it is to the emotional effect that a group effort can have on people. Ray knows fairly well that he is the major star of the show, yet he is careful enough to give the backing band some space — staying just a bit away from the mike so that you can switch your attention, at will, to the relentlessly pounding rhythm section or the brass groove; in a way, it feels as if Ray himself is driven by the music and his rapid-fire vocalizations are a direct consequence of being uplifted by his band members. On Tony's version, it feels as if the singer and the backing band are much less coordinated, with the singer almost swallowing the microphone so that you are forced to concentrate on him all the time, without any serious chance to focus your attention on whatever it is the Big Six are doing. But if even Ray Charles himself knows that he is not going to pull that groove out all on his own, how on Earth could Tony Sheridan get that much more confident?..

I guess it goes without saying, in the end, that hunting down Tony Sheridan's post-Beatles material should be qualified not just as a historical, but rather as a *meta*-historical activity — but on the other hand, there is absolutely no harm in trying, although I think that the only musical moment that mildly amused me on this record was when they used the old gruff distorted tone of the Burnette brothers' 'Train Kept A-Rollin' and 'Honey Hush' for the performance of 'My Babe': those are some tasty dark-chocolate guitar licks out there, and they sound ridiculously edgy even for 1964, despite going all the way back to 1956. Other than that, take this review simply as a personal certification that Tony Sheridan was an all-around nice fellow and had good taste in music, but that not everybody who hang around the Beatles in Hamburg automatically became a forgotten genius — and the same goes for the Big Six / Beat Brothers as well.

