

THE TORNADOS



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1962-1966</i>	<i>Classic pop-rock</i>	<i>Telstar (1962)</i>

Only Solitaire

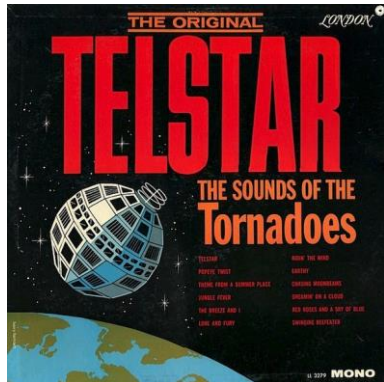
Artist: *Artist*

Years: *1962*

George Starostin's Reviews

Page contents:

- [The Original Telstar — The Sounds Of The Tornados](#) (1962)



THE ORIGINAL TELSTAR: THE SOUNDS OF THE TORNADOES

Album released:
Dec. 1962

V A L U E
A B C D E

More info:



Tracks: 1) *Telstar*; 2) *Red Roses And A Sky Of Blue*; 3) *Chasing Moonbeams*; 4) *Earthy*; 5) *Swinging Beefeater*; 6) *Theme From A Summer Place*; 7) *Love And Fury*; 8) *Dreamin' On A Cloud*; 9) *Ridin' The Wind*; 10) *The Breeze And I*; 11) *Jungle Fever*; 12) *Poyeye Twist*.

REVIEW

If ever you might have thought that ‘I Want To Hold Your Hand’ was the first UK single to top the American charts, you *should* have also thought that this would be too perfect to be true. In fact, the first UK single to top the American charts was ‘Stranger On The Shore’ by Mr. Acker Bilk, a clarinet-led easy-listening instrumental which would barely even register on the radar of public consciousness had it been recorded a couple years after 1962. However, the *second* UK single to top the American charts was ‘Telstar’ by the Tornadoes, a song that most certainly deserved the honor — and, for a teeny-tiny brief shining moment, made the Tornadoes into Britain’s hottest export material, even overriding the Shadows.



The main reason why that moment was so brief arguably lay in the fact that the Tornadoes were not a naturally-assembled band with its own agenda, like the Shadows. Instead, they came together in 1961 as a session band for producer, engineer, technician-extraordinaire and sonic visionary Joe Meek, whose imprint is vital to each and every one of the early Tornadoes’

recordings. A pioneer of all sorts of studio technologies and an early user of electronics, Meek allegedly could not play any instruments himself and needed a properly working ensemble to bounce off his ideas — which is not to say that the Tornadoes themselves were complete nobodies, of course: all five members were accomplished musicians, though most of them were making a living as session players and generally remained in obscurity.

That said, given that Meek was a sound wizard first and foremost, and the Tornadoes (classic lineup: Clem Cattini on drums, Heinz Burt on bass, George Bellamy on rhythm guitar, Alan Caddy on lead guitar, Roger LaVern on keyboards) were musicians first and composers second, one should not expect any particular melodic genius from this music. In essence, the Tornadoes were just your average instrumental band of the time — playing a mix of spaghetti-western, surf-pop, and easy listening tunes, the only difference being the final sound of it all: under Meek's guidance, they gave much, if not most, of that music a romantic, slightly corny, but unquestionably inventive space-age tinge.

Of course, looking at the track listing on their only album that mattered it is easy to understand why 'Telstar' became their only major hit. While all the other titles reflect either pure sentimentality ('Dreamin' On A Cloud') or land in the novelty ballpark ('Swingin' Beefeater'), 'Telstar' was the one composition written on the spur of a very particular moment — the launch of the Telstar communications satellite on July 10, 1962 — and with the Space Age still in full swing, the song just perfectly encapsulated that moment. Riding the wind on a fast, rather generic Morricone-style bassline, it makes its main point through a triumphant, teen-pop-Beethoven-esque electronic keyboard melody (it still seems to be a matter of debate whether the instrument in question is a clavichord, or a Univox, or a mix of both) which celebrates yet another giant leap for mankind with an ideally chosen uplifting chord sequence: as the satellite goes into orbit, so does the music rise higher and higher until it is finally stabilized in a glorious, self-satisfied cosmic purr. (Pretty sure that melody has been borrowed by many artists, but one case that leaps to mind immediately is Blondie's 'Dreaming' which shamelessly appropriated the main key change — though I certainly do not mind, given how Blondie were always intentionally going for the recreation of that starry-eyed, idealistic romance attitude of the early 1960s). Alan Caddy's short, but expressive ringing lead guitar solos are a small jewel on top, but ultimately it is all about that shoot-up-in-the-sky organ sound, of course.

Some skeptics say that the success of 'Telstar' was really just a fluke (or, even more cynically, a carefully calculated market move), but while it is probably true that nothing else on the album matches the romantic power of that electronic melody, Meek's production remains a unique creative touch even when the music itself turns out to be fairly generic and derivative (despite the fact that most of it is credited to the band members). From their first EP, **The Sounds Of The Tornadoes**, we

have 'Ridin' The Wind', an early precursor to 'Telstar', with the same clavioline-or-Ultravox in a slightly less prominent, more quietly pastoral mood, and with a wonderfully produced deep guitar solo made to sound like the rage and fury of a local God of Thunder; 'Red Roses And A Sky Of Blue', pretty much a standard folk dance tune, but made to reflect the local customs of alien pixies from Andromeda through its use of tones, echoes, and reverb; and 'Earthy', which is like... uh... Chubby Checker meets Star Trek? Something like that, largely due to the bubbling electronic keyboards counting out the rhythm every few measures. On the other hand, whenever that organ sound is downplayed, the results are less impressive: thus, 'Dreamin' On A Cloud', whose melody is almost completely guitar-dominated, is a pretty sentimental shuffle which is almost indistinguishable from contemporary Shadows material.

At least the titles tend to match the musical imagery: 'Chasing Moonbeams', for instance, with its flashing, playful staccato keyboard chords really does lead you on an imaginary game of tag-you're-it through a moonlit glade, if only for a minute and a half; and 'Jungle Fever', the B-side to 'Telstar', does honestly start out with a tribal beat and eventually leads to a pseudo-tribal chant, with elements of echo and distortion adding to the «jungle» atmosphere — although, needless to say, if you are looking for a proper African vibe, you have to look elsewhere: one thing Joe Meek could never lay claim to would be the pioneering of world beat.

The reason why the Tornados never released a properly successful follow-up to this collection (their only other album was next year's inferior **Away From It All**) was probably pragmatic. As a band, they were essentially happy to fulfill the role of loyal servants obeying a higher calling — when they were not in the studio recording under Joe Meek's guidance, they were touring the country as the backing band for Billy Fury, whose own musical agenda could hardly be further from Meek's vision. And Meek himself, plagued as he was with his own mental health issues — which, alas, so frequently accompany creative genius — could hardly be trusted to keep any single successful project going on for long. He did go on to produce dozens and dozens of UK acts (surprisingly, though, no first-tier names among them) before taking his own life in 1967, but in the end, I guess, for all of his legendary reputation 'Telstar' might still be the only specific recording of his that people remember... and even then, you'd really have to be there in 1962 to properly remember it.

