

M&amp;I MYCV 30659; Japan 2018; 35 / 55 min

*Night In F Minor / Bahia De Los Angeles / Ame No Kyoto / Dark Eyes / Blue Sky / Infinite Monkey / Evening Shadows / Fire Lights / Mr Moto / Instant Guitars / Remember Nokie (Medley: Surf Rider / Bluebird / Orange Fire) / Ain't Misbehaving / And I Love Her / Here We Go Again! // Walk Don't Run / Pipeline / Diamond Head / Walk Don't Run '64 / The Cruel Sea / Driving Guitars / Bulldog / Bumble Bee Rock / Wipe Out / Secret Agent Man / Goldfinger / Slaughter On Tenth Avenue / Caravan / Apache / A Taste Of Honey / Journey To The Stars / Manchurian Beat / El Cumbanchero / House Of The Rising Sun / Black Sand Beach / Ginza Lights / Hawaii Five-0*

CD1 is the first full release from The Ventures sans any of the original band members, so we have Bob Spalding (lead), Ian Spalding (rhythm, keys), Luke Griffin (bass, lead) and Leon Taylor (drums). CD2 is basically a compilation of tracks from the band's early 2000 series of top notch re-cuts under the V-Gold banner, featuring Nokie, Don, Bob and Leon with Gerry McGee replacing Nokie on a few titles.

It seems to me that maybe M&I are hedging their bets by including the V-Gold re-cuts just in case the "new" Ventures are not sufficient pull on their own but, frankly, they needn't have worried because our new guys put in a performance that every Ventures fan will want to own. There even seems to be a slight lack of confidence within the band itself because they opt to include versions of *Dark Eyes*, *Instant Guitars* and *Mr Moto* from The Ventures' early '60s catalogue and, while they are all expertly played, sound great, and even have some original touches about them, I can't help wondering if originals or titles without a Ventures association might have been a bolder choice. Even the front cover has a familiar look about it as the band's pose is similar to that which The Ventures struck in 1964 on the cover of their WDR '64 Dolton 45, so it seems to me that there is quite a lot of brand signalling going on here.

But, all that aside, CD1 is an absolute knockout! *Night In F Minor* kicks things off with quite a punch – it's actually a rocked up version of Chopin's *Nocturne In F Minor* and, as is often the case, a classical tune lends itself perfectly to a dynamic guitars and drums treatment and that's exactly what we get. Leon's snare hits hard and sharp cutting through the powerful beat while Bob's haunting lead guitar teases out the inherent sweetness of the melody. Bob and Ian's collaboration *Bahia De Los Angeles* (Bay Of Angels) is next up and is arguably the best track on the CD. It's a wonderfully warm melody delivered briskly with several differently-toned lead guitars which seem to weave in and out while a mandolin-like guitar caresses with a delicate Spanish feel.

Bravo, senores!

Bob takes on the lion's share of song-writing duties, being responsible for another five of the originals. *Blue Sky* is amongst the best – it features twin lead guitars working the memorable melody in tandem, with Luke and Ian propelling it along with solid bass and rhythm respectively while Leon provides his characteristically sharp drum work. As its title implies, *Infinite Monkey* is the wildest track and has a similar sort of drive as *Yozora No Hoshi* and includes lots of the creative sounds and ideas that you would have expected from The Ventures of yore.

There is a lovely tribute to Nokie Edwards with a medley of three of his finest compositions – *Surf Rider*, *Bluebird* and *Orange Fire* – a perfectly judged combination which does full justice to the man. *Ain't Misbehavin'* is a tune that I would never have thought of as a Ventures instrumental in a hundred years but it works brilliantly. As with many Ventures tracks from the past, it is all down to the clever multi-guitar arrangement which brings out so many aspects of the tune that you wouldn't normally have appreciated. *And I Love Her* is not treated acoustically as you might have expected, but as a straight forward beat ballad it works wonderfully well. The simple no frills treatment bringing out the pure beauty of the melody while the guitars flush out every shred of emotion to make it a very moving rendition of The Beatles classic.

Bob's *Here We Go Again!* makes a fitting climax to proceedings with Ian delivering his best Don Wilson-like rhythm chops while Bob picks out a striking riff that leads to a poignant middle-eight before returning to its catchy tune with Leon hammering away all the while – fantastic!

To any doubting Thomases out there who may have wondered if the new band could pull it off, doubt no more – this is a marvellous album which proves that the history of The Ventures can and will go on. The King is dead. Long Live The King!

*Dave Burke*

(theventures.com www.cdjapan.co.jp)