THE SUPER RARE DOO WOP BOX

By Tony Watson

The long-awaited ‘volume four’ of Rhino’s revered Doo Wop box sets never appeared. Now, thanks to Rock Beat, this has been rectified and is now available. This is what it contains.

When Rhino brought out their first ‘Doo Wop Box’ in 1994, expectations weren’t too high, but it went on to go gold and a further two volumes were released. The original sets, now discontinued, currently fetch good prices at auction, so Richard Foos, the original owner of Rhino thought it might be a good idea to bring out a fourth volume. No longer associated with Rhino, he put the suggestion to Rock Beat’s James Austin, who was only too happy to oblige. Austin got Billy Vera involved in the track selection (most of this material stems from Billy’s own collection) and research, and this new set is the result.

Each of the ten sides is in its own original case. There are no more re-issues chronologically, so the listener gets a sense of how the music evolved over the years. Of course the music wasn’t known as ‘Doo Wop’ in those days. The leads didn’t come into common usage until much later. Die-hard collectors at first refused to call this music Doo Wop, but now the term is almost universal.

The lead sides, on CD1, range from the wonderful 1951 Larks recording of ‘When I Leave These Prison Walls’ with great lead by Vernon Merritt, to the Vibe-Rains ‘Doll Face’ from 1954. This is the dawn of the 45s vocal harmony sound which followed in the wake of the succeses such as The Ravens, Clovers, Five Keys, Drifters etc. CD2 continues this vein into 1955 and sees the emergence of ‘When I Leave These Prison Walls’ with a great lead by the term is almost universal.

Of course there are some up-tempo numbers as well. Jump tunes, mambo, blues, and rock & roll are all represented, but the set’s main focus is on the classic group ballad (or in the 50s when you could still obtain copies of these from outlets such as Slim’s at Times Square (as detailed in the CD booklet) track selection and running order, and supplying many of the singles for re-mastering, Billy contributed the main sleeve-notes in the 32 page booklet that accompanies the set (James Austin provides some background into how the set came about by way of an introduction). Each and every track is detailed, with, in most cases, group members and recorded bio, recording details etc. As well as this there are a number of splendid photographs, label shots etc.

The box itself is well made and measures 12” deep by 5 ¼ inches across which is about an inch wider than most similar sets. The CDs, inlaid into cases in the polythene, are contained unusually in an ‘old-fashioned’ triple jewel box and a double jewel box instead of the now usual flip cases.

However, that’s a minor point in what, by any yardstick, is a major release for lovers of this enduring music. Obtainable from rockbeatrecords.com for around $60 £40 plus postage, or from your favourite specialist store or mail order supplier. Don’t hang around too long though, as I suspect this, like the three Rhino sets, will become a collector’s item in years to come.

Under Discussion:

THE SUPER RARE DOO WOP BOX

Rock Beat ROC-3305 Five-CD Box


TRACK LISTING

Disc 1: LARKS: When I Leave These Prison Walls; SAUVANNE CHURCHILL, WITH THE STRIDERS: Once There Lived A Fool; CRICKETS: You’re Mine; SWALLOWS: Trust Me; PELICANS: Rosemarie; MOONGLOWS: I Just Can’t Tell No Lie; 5 WILLOWS: My Dear, Darkest Dancing; MAGIC TONES: Good Googa Mooga; FIVE BELL: Please Tell It To Me; HORNETS: I Can’t Believe; CHIMES: Darkest Dancing; DOMINOES: These Foolish Things (Remind Me Of You); 5 WILLOWS: Love Bells; FLAMINGOS: September Song; CHARMERS: Tony, My Darling; EARLS: Believe Me, My Love; FIVE CHANCES: Nageshk; PELICANS: Aurelia; TEAR DROPS: The Stars Are Out Tonight; VIBRANAIRES: Doll Face

Disc 2: BELTONES: Estelle; MOONGLOWS: 219 Train; FEATUERS: Johnny Darling; 5 EMMERS: Please Come Home; FIVE CHANCES: All I Want; FIVE THRILLS: Glory; CASTELLES: Over A Cup Of Coffee; FIVE ECHOES: Lonely Mood; LEE ANDREWS & THE HEARTS: I Can’t Believe; DOMINOES: Shifting Sands; NICKY & THE NOBLES: My Baby; CHANDELIERS: Blueberry Street; ELCHORDS: Ridin’ The Rails; EL CAPRIS: Maggie; JESSE BELVIN: Dear Heart; CADILLACS: Zoom Boom Sing; CHESTNUTS: Love Is True; CAPRIS: (Shimmy Shimmy) Ko Ko Wop; BELLAIRS: Moments Like This; COPESETICS: Collegian; WILLIE: Little Darlin’; DE’BONAIRS: Mother’s Son; JETS: Heaven Above; MISTER NO: LONG STORY AND THE DIABLOS: You Are; KING S MEN: Don’t Say You’re Sorry; DEMES: Take Me As I Am; DELTAIRS: Lullabye Of The Bells; PLAYBOYS: So Good; SWANS: Believe In Me; VELVORS: Romeo; DEL-VIKINGS: A Sunday Kind Of Love; TRISKILL: Dry Your Eyes

Disc 3: LARKS: When I Leave These Prison Walls; PELICANS: Aurelia; DOMINOES: These Foolish Things (Remind Me Of You); 5 WILLOWS: My Dear, Darkest Dancing; MAGIC TONES: Good Googa Mooga; FIVE BELL: Please Tell It To Me; HORNETS: I Can’t Believe; CHIMES: Darkest Dancing; DOMINOES: These Foolish Things (Remind Me Of You); 5 WILLOWS: Love Bells; FLAMINGOS: September Song; CHARMERS: Tony, My Darling; EARLS: Believe Me, My Love; FIVE CHANCES: Nageshk; PELICANS: Aurelia; TEAR DROPS: The Stars Are Out Tonight; VIBRANAIRES: Doll Face

Disc 4: WHISPERS: Are You Sorry; INSPIRATORS: Maggie; JESSE BELVIN: Dear Heart; CADILLACS: Zoom Boom Sing; CHESTNUTS: Love Is True; CAPRIS: (Shimmy Shimmy) Ko Ko Wop; BELLAIRS: Moments Like This; COPESETICS: Collegian; WILLIE: Little Darlin’; DE’BONAIRS: Mother’s Son; JETS: Heaven Above; MISTER NO: LONG STORY AND THE DIABLOS: You Are; KING S MEN: Don’t Say You’re Sorry; DEMES: Take Me As I Am; DELTAIRS: Lullabye Of The Bells; PLAYBOYS: So Good; SWANS: Believe In Me; VELVORS: Romeo; DEL-VIKINGS: A Sunday Kind Of Love; TRISKILL: Dry Your Eyes

Disc 5: LARKS: When I Leave These Prison Walls; PELICANS: Aurelia; DOMINOES: These Foolish Things (Remind Me Of You); 5 WILLOWS: My Dear, Darkest Dancing; MAGIC TONES: Good Googa Mooga; FIVE BELL: Please Tell It To Me; HORNETS: I Can’t Believe; CHIMES: Darkest Dancing; DOMINOES: These Foolish Things (Remind Me Of You); 5 WILLOWS: Love Bells; FLAMINGOS: September Song; CHARMERS: Tony, My Darling; EARLS: Believe Me, My Love; FIVE CHANCES: Nageshk; PELICANS: Aurelia; TEAR DROPS: The Stars Are Out Tonight; VIBRANAIRES: Doll Face

All photographs and label shots courtesy Billy Vera.