

# 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.



The Flamingos

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.

Rare sides indeed – that is in terms of the original releases. If you set out nowadays to obtain the 45s or 78s in this set, you'd need to sell your house, car and possibly family too! Of course the majority of the sides here have seen much action from the bootleggers and pd merchants over the years, but the sound quality on those has often been variable. Here, great care has been taken to obtain the best sound possible from Billy's clean originals by Rock Beat's Jerry Patterson, which means we are today spoiled by being able to obtain these classic sides so easily.

The 101 sides, recorded between 1951 and 1963, are arranged more-or-less 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 term 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 earliest sides, on CD1, range from the wonderful 1951 Larks recording of 'When I Leave These Prison Walls' with great heartfelt lead by Eugene Mumford, to The Vibranaires 'Doll Face' from 1954. This is the dawn of the r&b vocal group harmony 'sound' which followed in the wake of the success of groups such as the Ravens, Clovers, Five Keys, Drifters etc. CD2 continues this vein into 1955 and sees the emergence of great groups such as The Valentines, Five Thrills, Castelles, Hearts, Crickets and the wonderful Strangers. CD3 is all 1955 and showcases the period when the music was possibly at its peak, with wonderful groups such as The Harptones, Orchids, Solitaires, Scarlets, Four Fellows and Heartbeats being showcased. CD4 takes us through the rock & roll years to 1957 and again there is an abundant crop of great groups such as The Cadillacs, Willows, Diablos, Velours and Del-Vikings. The final CD, covering the period up to 1963, really oversees the final years of r&b vocal harmony, but there are still some gems here, such as The Vocaltones, Teenchords and Dreamlovers, along with the emergence

of the Italian-American groups, represented here by such as Nicky & The Nobles and The Ebb-Tides. Sales might have been declining, but there were still some quality sounds emerging.

Whilst some of these sides, primarily slow ballads, may be something of an acquired taste, particularly on this side of the Atlantic, those who have acquired it will be in raptures at the wonderful harmonies and classic lead singing. The converted amongst us will know what I mean when I say that numbers such as The Harptones' 'Loving A Girl Like You', The Baltineers' 'Moments Like This', The Strangers' 'Hoping You'll Understand', The Dominoes' 'These Foolish Things', with Clyde McPhatter's spectacularly fragile lead singing, and The Mastertones' 'They Say', can send shivers down the spine!

There are many more rapture-inducing ballads on this set of course, I just wish there were space to mention them all. Suffice to say that those who like their harmonies sweet and greasy (to paraphrase an early LP of this music that helped to get me set on the vocal group journey) will not be disappointed!

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 that is so much appreciated by long-time collectors, particularly those out there who grew up with this music such as Billy Vera.

Billy Vera has been a long-time champion of this music, purchasing many of these sides back in the 60s when you could still obtain copies of these from outlets such as Slim's at

Times Square (as detailed in the booklet). Apart from deciding the track selection and running order, and supplying many of the singles for re-mastering, Billy contributes 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 potted bios, 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 6" across which is about an inch wider than most similar sets. The CDs, inlaid into recesses in the polyfoam, are contained unusually in an 'old-fashioned' triple jewel box and a double jewel box instead of the now more usual flip cases.

The one minus point might be the booklet's style. Over-large font size, with hardly a border around each column, doesn't, in my opinion, look attractive. A smaller font-size (say half of what it is) might have looked much better and would have needed far fewer pages, or preferably, the same number of pages with more information!

However, that's a minor point in what, by any yardstick, is a major release for lovers of this enduring music. Obtainable from rock-beatrecords.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 (101 Hard-To-Find Vocal Group Gems)**  
 Rock Beat ROC-3305 Five-CD Box Set (55:16, 54:09, 55:52, 51:12, 48:47)

## TRACK LISTING

Disc 1: LARKS: When I Leave These Prison Walls; SAVANNAH CHURCHILL WITH THE STRIDERS: Once There Lived A Fool; CRICKETS: You're Mine; SWALLOWS: Trust Me; CHIMES: Rosemarie; MOONGLOWS: I Just Can't Tell No Lie; 5 WILLOWS: My Dear, Dearest Darling; MAGIC TONES: Good Googa Mooga; FIVE BELLS: Please Tell It To Me; HORNETS: I Can't Believe; CHIMES: Dearest Darling; 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: Nagasaki; PELICANS: Aurelia; TEAR DROPS: The Stars Are Out Tonight; VIBRANAIREs: Doll Face  
 Disc 2: BELLTONES: Estelle; MOONGLOWS: 219 Train; FEATHERS: Johnny Darling; 5 EMBERS: Please Come Home; FIVE CHANCES: All I Want; FIVE THRILLS: Gloria; CASTELLES: Over A Cup Of Coffee; FIVE ECHOES: Lonely Mood; LEE ANDREWS & THE HEARTS: Bells Of St. Mary's; FIVE BLUE NOTES: My Gal Is Gone;



The Mello-Harps



The Flamingos

STRANGERS: Hoping You'll Understand; PELICANS: Chimes; CRICKETS: Your Love; SWANS: My True Love; DIABLOS: The Wind; VALENTINES: Tonight Kathleen; VELVETS: They Tried; MASTERTONES: Tell Me; FOUR BUDDIES: Delores; CASANOVAS: I Don't Want You To Go

Disc 3: HARPTONES: Loving A Girl Like You; KEYNOTES: Really Wish You Were Here; MELLO-HARPS: Love Is A Vow; ORCHIDS: Newly Wed; VOCALTONES: Darling (You Know I Love You); LYRES: Ship Of Love; CONCORDS: Monticello; FIVE DIAMONDS: Ten Commandments Of Love; HARPTONES: It All Depends On You; ORCHIDS: You Said You Loved Me; SOLITAIRES: I Don't Stand A Ghost Of A Chance; CALIFORNIANS: My Angel; INSPIRATORS: If Loving You Is Wrong; SCARLETS: Love Doll; FOUR FELLOWS: In The Rain; PYRAMIDS: And I Need You; HEARTBEATS QUINTET: Tormented; KIDDS: Are You Forgetting Me; FIVE STARS: We Danced In The Moonlight; SEQUINS: Why Can't You Treat Me Right

Disc 4: WHISPERS: Are You Sorry; INSPIRATIONS: Maggie; JESSE BELVIN: Dear Heart; CADILLACS: Zoom Boom Sing; CHESTNUTS: Love Is True; EL CAPRIS: (Shimmy Shimmy) Ko Ko Wop; BALTINEERS: Moments Like This; COPESETICS: Collegian; WILLOWS: Little Darlin'; DE'BONAIRES: Mother's Son; JETS: Heaven Above Me; NOLAN STRONG & THE DIABLOS: You Are; KING'S MEN: Don't Say You're Sorry; DEMEMS: Take Me As I Am; DELTAIRS: Lullaby Of The Bells; PLAYBOYS: So Good; SWANS: Believe In Me; VELOURS: Romeo; DEL-VIKINGS: A Sunday Kind Of Love; INSPIRATIONS: Dry Your Eyes

Disc 5: LADDINS: Did It; VOCALTONES: Walking With My Baby; CHANDELIERS: Blueberry Street; ELCHORDS: Peppermint Stick (Featuring Butchie Saunders); UNIQUE TEENS: Jeannie; LEWIS LYMON & THE TEEN CHORDS: Dance Girl; EBB-TIDES: Franny Franny; RAJAHS: Shifting Sands; NICKY & THE NOBLES: School Bells; SCHOOLBOYS: Angel Of Love; NOBLES: Poor Rock'n'Roll; JESSE BELVIN: Deacon Dan Tucker; DELRAYS: Our Love Is True/ One Kiss, One Smile and A Dream; DINO & THE DIPLOMATS: My Dream; DEE CALS: A Wonderful Day; FABULONS: Smoke From Your Cigarette; DREAMLOVERS: Zoom Zoom Zoom; LITTLE JIMMY & THE TOPS: Puppy Love; CORVAIRS: True True Love; CAMELOTS: Your Way

All photographs and label shots courtesy Billy Vera.