



# OUR FAVOURITE MELODIES

..... *Great British Record Labels: Embassy* .....

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DISC ONE

1. DICK JORDAN *Here Comes Summer*
2. PAUL RICH *Tell Laura I Love Her*
3. BUD ASHTON *The Frightened City*
4. KAY BARRY *Here Comes That Feeling*
5. JOHNNY CHESTER *Last Night Was Made For Love*
6. STEVE STANNARD *Walk Don't Run*
7. RAY PILGRIM & MIKE REDWAY *Sealed With A Kiss*
8. KAY BARRY *It Might As Well Rain Until September*
9. DON DUKE & BOBBY STEVENS  
*More Than I Can Say*
10. JOHNNY WORTH *A Fool Such As I*
11. BUD ASHTON *Nut Rocker*
12. REDD WAYNE *Don't Ever Change*
13. DON DUKE *Wild Wind*
14. MAUREEN EVANS *Stupid Cupid*
15. JOHNNY WORTH *Nine Times Out Of Ten*
16. BOBBY STEVENS *Wild One*
17. KAY BARRY *Tell Me What He Said*
18. RAY PILGRIM & MIKE REDWAY  
*Breaking Up Is Hard To Do*
19. HAL MUNRO *Dream Lover*
20. STEVE STANNARD *Let There Be Drums*
21. JOHNNY WORTH *How About That*
22. BOBBIE BRITTON *Dance With Me*
23. DON DUKE *Get Lost*
24. KAY BARRY *Like I Do*
25. BUD ASHTON *Kon-Tiki*
26. JOHNNY WORTH *Lonely Boy*
27. RIKKI HENDERSON *Only Sixteen*
28. KAY BARRY *Bobby's Girl*
29. STEVE STANNARD *Riders In The Sky*
30. JOHNNY WORTH *When*
31. MAUREEN EVANS *Plenty Good Lovin'*
32. BUD ASHTON *Shazam*
33. BOBBY STEVENS *A Mess Of Blues*
34. PAUL RICH *Fabulous*
35. THE TUNETTES *Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On*

DISC TWO

1. BOBBY STEVENS *His Latest Flame*
2. MARION WILLIAMS *The Loco-Motion*
3. JOHNNY WORTH *Someone Else's Baby*
4. BOBBY STEVENS *Shakin' All Over*
5. BUD ASHTON *Apache*
6. JOHNNY WORTH *Mean Streak*
7. REDD WAYNE & BOBBY STEVENS  
*Ginny Come Lately*
8. MIKE REDWAY *Venus In Blue Jeans*
9. CHARLES YOUNG *Johnny Will*
10. BOBBY STEVENS *Take Good Care Of My Baby*
11. RIKKI HENDERSON *Be Mine*
12. THE CANADIANS *Blue Suede Shoes*
13. GORDON FRANKS *Hoots Mon*
14. THE CRANES SKIFFLE GROUP *Freight Train*
15. HAL BURTON *Rave On*
16. HAL MUNRO *It's Late*
17. MAUREEN EVANS *Lipstick On Your Collar*
18. BOBBY STEVENS *Counting Teardrops*
19. STEVE STANNARD *Rocking Goose*
20. JEAN CAMPBELL *My Heart Has A Mind Of Its Own*
21. BOBBY STEVENS *I'm Looking Out The Window*
22. BUD ASHTON *Wheels*
23. HAL MUNRO *You Always Hurt The One You Love*
24. DON DUKE *Calendar Girl*
25. BOBBY STEVENS *Halfway To Paradise*
26. KAY BARRY *James (Hold The Ladder Steady)*
27. RAY PILGRIM & MIKE REDWAY  
*No One Can Make My Sunshine Smile*
28. TURK ELLIS *On The Rebound*
29. JEAN CAMPBELL *You Don't Know*
30. BUD ASHTON *Wonderful Land*
31. JEAN CAMPBELL *I'm Sorry*
32. JOHNNY WORTH *Western Movies*
33. THE CANADIANS *Rock Around The Clock*
34. HAL MUNRO *C'Mon Everybody*
35. PAUL RICH *Our Favourite Melodies*

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## 2CD Set RHGB 50

Released November 18th 2016



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The eternally uncool, unloved **Embassy Records** was one of the most successful and profitable UK record labels of the 50s & 60s, yet you won't find any of their best sellers listed in the Official Charts book, and you never heard them on the wireless, either. Nor, generally, will you see many Embassy 78s or 45s featuring on your average collector's "Wants List" - indeed, until relatively recently, you rarely even saw a box of Embassy singles at a Record Fair. Of course, the reason for their non-appearance in the various UK hit parades was simple; Woolworths were never a Chart Return shop! But the hard fact remains that most Embassy releases sold in their tens - some, in their hundreds - of thousands, and many outsold the actual UK hit versions. Ironically they've now, belatedly, started to become 'collectable'. Launched in Nov. 1954, after **Jacques** and **Morris Levy**, owners of **Oriole Records**, fought off a rival bid from Planet Records to record and manufacture versions of current songs, to be sold exclusively through Woolworths' stores. The concept was perfect; two proven contemporary hits, back-to-back, at budget price. At that time there were around 600 branches of Woolworths in the UK (this would rise to more than 1,000 by the late 50s), and the start-up plan was that each store would take a minimum of 200 copies of each release, of which there were usually around half-a-dozen per month. Initially, the discs were 10" 78 rpm singles; the earliest Embassy 45s started appearing in 1958, by which time first pressing runs had risen to 20,000 units. This was, of course, an excellent business venture for the Levy's, who earned handsomely from each leg of the process, as in addition to owning a state-of-the-art recording studio, they also had their own pressing plant, manufacturing, distribution and storage facilities (NB: for the history of Oriole Records, check out RHGB36). To make the deal even sweeter, Woolworths were only allowed the UK rights to these recordings; consequently, Oriole licensed many of these sides out internationally - to record companies in Australia, Holland, Belgium, France, West Germany, Scandinavia, USA, Spain, South America, etc - where they enjoyed some surprising successes.

Incidentally, Embassy weren't, by any means, Woolies' first venture into the realm of budget records. At different times during the 1920s and 30s they had the Mimosa, Little Marvel, Eclipse, Victory and Crown labels, all of which issued shellac discs, of varying speeds and diameters, usually at 6d each. The principal difference was that this time around, they would be releasing cover versions of the Popular hits of the day, whereas before WWII, their records had covered all bases from childrens' nursery rhymes, to marching bands.

The label was run by **Jack Baverstock**, who appointed a young, then-unknown violinist, **Johnny Gregory**, as head of A&R. Initially, Jacques Levy produced sessions, although he soon moved back upstairs, following the appointment of **Reg Warburton** as producer. Their catalogue numbers were prefixed WB, which stood for Woolworths Brand (Oriole's own releases were prefixed CB: Company Brand) and their modus operandi was to hold weekly three-hour sessions every Thursday at their New Bond Street studio, when they would expect to record four tracks, which would in turn be in the stores on the following Monday. Because of this they had to use wholly reliable session singers and musicians, working to extremely tight margins - for in order to achieve this, and sell the discs at little more than half the price of a regular chart record (they would go up to around four shillings, within a couple of years), budgets were exceptionally tight.

In the pre-R&R era they were enormously successful - a massive early seller was Bob Dale's 'Yellow Rose Of Texas', which sold more than 100,000 copies, more than the hit versions by either Mitch Miller, Gary Miller, or Ronnie Hilton - and their bright, breezy covers of the popular tunes of the day were widely praised. However, their earliest R&R covers very much reflected the UK music biz's prevalent attitude at that time - i.e. original US recordings were generally perceived to be primitive (and by inference, inferior) and could therefore be easily spruced up via the application of a Victor Silvester-styled ballroom dancing arrangement and a stiff injection of good old BBC danceband musicianship. Indeed their versions of '**Blue Suede Shoes**' and '**Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On**' must, surely, have been learned from the sheet music, as clearly, no-one had listened to either Carl Perkins' or Jerry Lee's records ('**Rock Around The Clock**' wasn't much better, with its vibes solo). But to be fair to Embassy, this phase didn't last very long; once it had become abundantly clear that (a) R&R wasn't merely the latest novelty dance craze, and (b) teenagers wanted (reasonably) authentic covers of the current hits, they gradually began trying to get it right.

As you might expect, a number of Oriole artists also recorded for Embassy, notably **Maureen Evans** (whose **Connie Francis** covers routinely outsold Connie's original versions - even the chart-topping 'Stupid Cupid'), **Dick Jordan** (who had a couple of minor hits of his own on Oriole, and also recorded for Embassy as **Don Duke**), **Johnny Worth** (as **Les Vandayke**, he wrote many hits for Adam Faith - which he then 'covered', himself, on Embassy!), **Mike Redway** (aka **Redd Wayne**) and **Ray Pilgrim** (aka **Bobby Stevens**). Additionally, the Ted Taylor Four played on many sessions, often as **Steve Stannard** (as did **Gordon Franks**), whilst Chas McDevitt's Skiffle Group bizarrely covered their own hit, '**Freight Train**', as **The Cranes Skiffle Group**, and Oh Boy! star Neville Taylor cut a handful of fascinating R&B-styled covers of white R&R hits, billed as **Hal Munro**.

Elsewhere, highly experienced danceband, cabaret and BBC Light Programme Go Man Go singers like **Paul Rich**, **Jean Campbell**, **Rikki Henderson**, **Bobbie Britton**, **Kay Barry** (real name, Barbara Kay) and **The Canadians** were also Embassy stalwarts, as were the Mike Sammes Singers, in their various incarnations, who invariably provided vocal backings (they also recorded as **The TUNETTES**). **Bud Ashton** was a made-up name, usually affixed to guitar intros (although oddly enough, Bud's name also appeared on '**Nut Rocker**'), whose 'true' identity was the subject of conjecture for many years. Bert Weedon always stoutly denied that he ever recorded for the label, but names definitely in the frame include Bob Rogers (from the Ted Taylor Four), who in turn confirmed that mainstream session guitarists like Eric Ford, Ernie Shear, Big Jim Sullivan and Judd Proctor, all played on Embassy intros, whilst Vick Flick, from the John Barry Seven, has also owned up to his involvement.

In May 1993, BBC Radio 2 presented an excellent, hour-long documentary, Mantovani With Three Violins - The Embassy Records Story, narrated by Brian Matthew. Among those interviewed were Johnny Gregory, who made the point: "People often had the wrong impression. Because it was a cheap label, a lot thought it was a cheap operation... it wasn't, it brought the best out in all of us... musicians, singers, alike..." while Morris Levy's son, Eddie (a successful music publisher in his own right) added: "...they were the very best session musicians and very accomplished singers, who were doing cabaret work and knew they could never become stars themselves. But put them in a studio, tell them to sing a song, and they'd do so in five minutes... that's how Embassy turned the records out so quickly..." However, Gregory also observed: "I can't think of any artist who started out on Embassy becoming a big name... it was the kiss of death for some artists, because they were unknown, and they'd never made a record before. You were so many other people, that you were never yourself... you were everybody else except yourself... I think that's why a lot of the singers didn't get any further..."

But to give the final word to Ray Pilgrim, it was ultimately all about the songs, and the label: "We didn't regard ourselves as stars, we were just professionals. It was Embassy that was the Star!"