

DEL SHANNON

Title: Live In Europe

Label: BGO

Release Date: 1996

Medium: CD

Availability: Very Good

Venue: Princess Club, Manchester, England

Recording Date: December, 1972

Lineup: Del Shannon - Vocals, guitar
John Mac's Flare Band

Max Crook - Musitron

Set List: Hats Off To Larry
Handy Man
The Swiss Maid
Hey Little Girl
Little Town Flirt
Kelly
Crying

Two Kinds Of Teardrops
Coopersville Yodel
The Answer To Everything
Keep Searchin' (We'll Follow the Sun)
What's A Matter Baby
So Long Baby
Runaway

Del Shannon was one of the most original and talented singer/songwriters of the early sixties. Among other things, Shannon pioneered the use of minor chords, wrote nearly all of his own material, and was the first American singer to cover a song written by the Beatles. Overall, he placed 9 singles into the top forty, with three of them cracking the top ten. His songs were often about abandonment, loss, and rejection, an eerie coincidence when one considers all the personal problems he would have throughout his life. He battled alcoholism for years and committed suicide in 1990 while struggling with depression. However, his accomplishments were so considerable that he was elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1999.

By the age of 14, Charles Westover was playing guitar and performing in school shows. When he graduated from high school, Westover changed his name to Del Shannon (after a friend and a Cadillac Coupe de Ville) and decided to become a full time musician. He signed with Detroit's Big Top label in 1960 and recorded a series of demos. While recording more material in 1961 in New York City, Shannon began experimenting with the use of minor chords. During these sessions, he wrote and recorded a song named "Runaway".

Featuring his near falsetto voice, hiccup effects, and the eerie organ solo by Max Crook, the song climbed to number one. It would also sell over one million copies. Shannon followed his mega hit with "Hats Off To Larry" (#5-1961), "So Long Baby" (#28-1961), "Hey! Little Girl" (#38-1962), and "Little Town Flirt" (#12-1963). His album, *Little Town Flirt* (#12-1963), nearly cracked the top ten. While Shannon was a star in the United States, he was even more popular in England. During tours there, he met the Beatles and decided to record a cover of their song, "From Me To You".

While Shannon was as hot as any artist in 1961 and 1962, his momentum was derailed by a series of unexpected problems. In 1963, he got into protracted legal problems with his publishers. Distracted by these problems, Shannon's recording output dropped. He would crack the top forty with "Handy Man" (#22-1964), "Keep Searchin' (We'll Follow The Sun)" (#9-1964), and "Stranger In Town" (#30-1965) over

the next two years, but then dropped off the charts. A switch to Liberty Records in 1966 did not change things. By 1969, Shannon had left Liberty and was focusing on a new career as a producer.

Shannon's production credits include Smith's 1969 hit single, "Baby It's You" and Brian Hyland's 1970 hit single, "Gypsy Woman". Even though he was carving out a successful niche as a producer, he continued to release new material and play live. He became very popular on the rock nostalgia circuit in the early seventies. He even recorded with Jeff Lynne and released a couple of singles in the mid seventies. None of these efforts went anywhere, in part because of his struggles with alcoholism.

After taking a two year hiatus in 1976 and 1977 to battle the disease, Shannon returned to music. In 1981, the singer recorded a new album with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers called *Drop Down And Get Me* (#123-1981). The record yielded his last hit single, "Sea of Love" (#33-1982). While the singer continued to perform live for the rest of the decade, he did not release any more albums. While battling with depression, Shannon shot and killed himself on February 8, 1990. His widow later sued the manufacturer of the drug Prozac, a drug he was taking at the time.

There are several compilations available that feature the music of this remarkable musician. The best include Rhino's 1990 set, *Greatest Hits*, which contains 20 songs. Raven's 1998 release, *1961 - 1990 A Complete Career Anthology*, includes 57 tracks. Varese's 2001 set, *25 All-Time Greatest Hits*, contains 25 tracks. Collectables' 2002 release, *Runaway: The Very Best of Del Shannon*, includes 30 tracks. Finally, Capitol's 2003 set, *Classic Masters*, contains 12 tracks. Each of these sets is available at a large music retailer. Del Shannon only released one official live album during his career. *Live In Europe* was originally released in 1972 by United Artists. The record was out of print for many years until BGO combined it with an unreleased studio album, *And The Music Plays On*, and reissued it in 1996. I was able to get a copy.

Live In England was recorded at a single December, 1972 show in Manchester, England. By the time this show was recorded, Shannon had not cracked the top 100 singles chart since 1966. However, he remained a popular concert attraction, especially in England where he was considered a superstar. As this set clearly shows, he was still a dynamic performer with enough vocal chops to put younger, more successful singers to shame. Some of the vocal gymnastics on this 14 song set are amazing.

Shannon does a drop dead impression of Roy Orbison on a vintage cover of "Crying" and sets a vocal speed record on "Coopersville Yodel", a song he used to sing as a child. However, the set really kicks into gear when Shannon starts singing his own hits. His versions of "Hats Off To Larry", "Little Town Flirt", "Keep Searchin' (We'll Follow the Sun)", and "Runaway" are exceptional. On "Runaway", Shannon raises the audience to a fevered state with an extended ending sequence that is boiling with energy. Even his versions of top forty hits like "Hey Little Girl", "So Long Baby", and "Handy Man" light up the stage.

During this show, Shannon is accompanied by a backup band that is only identified as John Mac's Flare Band. Despite some extensive research, I was unable to identify the members of this excellent group. They are featured throughout the set but most prominently on "Handy Man". One backup musician who is credited is British keyboard wiz Max Crook, who plays the distinctive farfasi like organ solos that drive "Runaway" and "Hats Off To Larry". Shannon also plays guitar during the show, adding to the full sound of the band. Finally, the various members of John Mac's Flare Band provide sparkling, tight harmonies. Their considerable contributions should have been acknowledged, since they are vital part of this album.

It is clear from listening to this set that Del Shannon was the real thing. He was clearly one of the best singers of his time, capable of singing in nearly any style, including country, bluegrass, pop, and ballads.

He also was an very good songwriter, credited on nine of the fourteen tracks on this recording. And, like many of his contemporaries, Shannon was a dynamite live performer who was capable of driving audiences wild. He deserves his place in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and this recording is as good a way as any to catalog his considerable talents. BGO Records deserves to be thanked for resurrecting this remarkable set.