

TO BE OR NOT TO BE (Mock-Stereo),

THAT IS THE QUESTION

Preamble: Malcolm asked if I would reproduce an original article of mine for the website. It is a great pleasure since it marked my first real foray into authorship even though my passion for the Shadows' music had already well exceeded thirty years.

I was minded to put pen to paper because I was making many new discoveries, albeit feeling somewhat alone in my nerdy studies of the guitar group, its mutations and output. Ian Kershaw's magnificent publication SCOFA {The Shadows Circle of Friends Australia}, had launched some years earlier in 1982 in Tasmania but was now providing me with a welcome forum even though the magazine took forever to arrive and, one was never quite sure when the next issue was due!

At the time, Ian had inputted my old-fashioned typewritten script into his computer and in doing so had introduced a few typos and omissions; he also inserted some of his own comments as you will see, for these are clearly marked. Intentionally, I have kept the content almost exactly the way it was printed in the original magazine (number 33) but I have made a few punctuation changes, and that is all apart from modern formatting. I have made no attempt to alter my original findings or comments although one might be able to argue some points given that another twenty years have passed by since then.

Reading through it all once again I see that it opened a door to my later work with Malcolm and the books that we co-authored. Whether contrived analogue mock-stereo sound is of consequence in these digital days is for you to decide. But, as I point out within my article, that misses the point because they exist and they cannot be readily ignored within the body of work put out under the Shadows' name. Please feel free to decide for yourself!

SCOFA Article

As a new(ish) member of SCOFA, I was particularly fascinated to read Jim Nugent's article in a back-issue that Ian Kershaw sent to me. The title was '*NORRIE PARAMOR'S STEREO PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES*' [SCOFA Sept 1991] and this excellent, informative piece inspired me to put on headphones and do something I hadn't done for years. I listened! It was probably the first time I had listened intently since my youth when it was expected that I would learn the lead, bass and rhythm guitar parts in a night so that my group could play the latest Shads' tune the very next day!

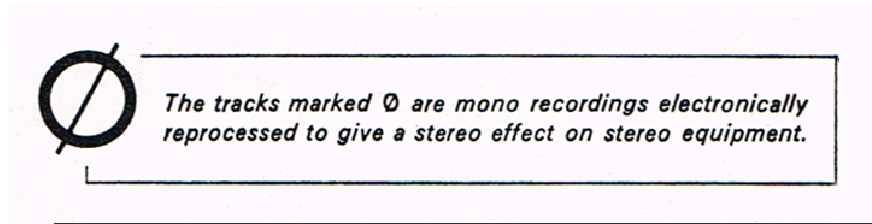
We hear and absorb music in a strange way. We're able to sing along with a tune we last heard perhaps twenty or thirty years ago. We can follow every nuance of an arrangement, yet most of the time we hear without really listening at all. Do you notice if a track is mono or stereo? Could you really say where the drums, rhythm, or lead guitars were located in relation

to each other? Did you actually hear the bass pattern? Or (most pertinently here) can you tell if the sound was true stereo or just a figment of the studio engineer's imagination?

It's long been said that fans would prefer that mock-stereo had been still-born. Others only acknowledge a mock-stereo version where no true stereo mix exists and, how often do you see a track listing or discography that mentions mock-stereo items at all? However, all this misses the point entirely; they DO exist and we've listened to them for years, probably without even knowing.

THE BEGINNINGS

▣ In November 1969, The Shadows (without Bruce in the line-up) were disbanding, having failed to score with their first-ever full stereo Single release **Slaughter on 10th Avenue**. At the same time, fans were confronted with an unusual notice on the sleeve [not on the Australian album SOEX 9639 though. I.K.K] of the newly issued Regal Starline compilation album SOMETHIN' ELSE!! (SRS 5012), which read:



This proved to be the first of four distinct groups of electronically-altered tracks to assail our ears and, it was perhaps this release which would precondition our judgement of the technology.

The album contained two mock-stereo tracks, which incidentally turned out to be the only vocal tracks ever to receive this treatment. They were:

Saturday Dance

Lonesome Fella

These were the A and B sides respectively of the re-christened Shadows' first Single release from almost ten years earlier, and they were the last of the probable "mono only" seven recorded during 1959. As such, they were a good choice for the experiment; unfortunately, it was an experiment that didn't really work out particularly well.

If you are able, listen to these two tracks on headphones first, and you'll be surprised at how 'left-sided' they are. **Lonesome Fella** has the accompanying voices shifted left, and with

Saturday Dance it's the bass. There is a strange lack of sound in the right ear which is very off-putting, particularly on the former track. We have to bear in mind though, that people didn't normally use headphones in the 1960s – records were meant to be listened to at moderate volume in an ordinary room through speakers, so this is a better test for any final stereophonic effect achieved. In this respect the sound image does improve, because the insistent tambourine beat in **Lonesome Fella** is apparent to the right of centre.

PHASE 2

▣ Ulrich Sasu, kindly explaining EMI/ Columbia's numbering system to me, confirms a probable August 1971 release date for THE SHADOWS GREATEST HITS stereo LP (SCX 1522) as listed in Otto Kasper's excellent (and essential!) discography *YESTERDAY TODAY*. Note that this was some eight years after the mono release. If this is so, then the second batch of mock-stereo recordings came to us with no announcement whatsoever, and many fans may be unaware of their true nature.

The budget-priced EMI/ Music for Pleasure compilation THE SHADOWS (MFP 1388) is affectionately referred to as WALKIN' in deference to the title used on the record label itself. It was issued in July 1970 with the unloved blue cover, only to be withdrawn and reissued with the 'bench' cover one month later. According to George Geddes' *HISTORY AND DISCOGRAPHY OF THE SHADOWS* (1981) [now out of print: I.K.K.] this record was also released in France, Italy, Germany and Spain [it was also released in Australia as MFP-A-8173 with the same Walkin' disc label: IKK]. Later in 1975, Pye Records re-released the album on the EMBER label in the UK (SE 8031). I can't answer for the foreign releases, but all three UK LPs have identical contents, and four of the tracks are in an electronically-altered form:

Sweet Dreams

What a Lovely Tune

Ranka Chank

I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Arthur

None of the record sleeves, inner sleeves or labels has anything to indicate that these tracks are anything other than true stereo recordings, but they are not!

Probably the best known mock-stereo track is **What a Lovely Tune**. Brian's "doubled" voice coming at you from both left and right, sounds very strange through headphones and, not much better through speakers. But, you can at least hear him tapping away at his "coconut" just to the right of the sound image. Wisely, the 1989 vinyl and CD versions of THE SHADOWS IN THE 60s left this one well alone, opting instead for mono, but John Friesen included the mock-stereo mix on CD3 of THE EARLY YEARS boxed set – so it's available both ways on CD. In my opinion, this is the case of the 'improvement' being worse

than the original, though some commentators prefer it! Of course, we must remember that no true stereo recording of **What a Lovely Tune** exists, so perhaps it's marginally better than nothing. This isn't the case with the other three tracks as they all appear in true stereo elsewhere.

By comparison, it isn't so well-known that when you listen to a "stereo" recording of **Ranka Chank**, you are probably listening to a mock-stereo mix. You may be able to check this for yourself. Firstly, listen to the mono sound on the EP RHYTHM 'N' GREENS – the only place you'll find it in mono on a UK release. Then, compare it with any copy of the WALKIN' album, the See-For-Miles SHADOWS EP COLLECTION VOL.II or even try the LEGENDS OF ROCK 'N' ROLL CD if you have it. What you will find is that the sound image has been expanded far out to the edges, with the drumming providing the most obvious shift. Other instrument separation is not heard so distinctly within the heavy stomping beat but mono it isn't! To hear **Ranka Chank** in its full glory, now listen to the marvellous all-stereo compilation album THE SHADOWS AT THE MOVIES or even a stereo RHYTHM 'N' GREENS EP if you have one. On CD it comes on THE EARLY YEARS set (CD5). Now you'll clearly hear Hank "chanking" away on the right, with Bruce on the left deftly mixing it for all he's worth. Complementing all this is John Rostill's brilliant bass playing, so distinctly heard in the centre – it's a huge improvement over that mock-stereo sound.

Digressing for a moment; it is interesting that this track is denoted **Ranka Clank** on the (earlier) WALKIN' albums. By the time Syd Gillingham wrote the notes for the Pye/Ember release, he actually believed it and referred to it as such in the sleeve notes – **Ranka Clank** indeed!

Turning now to the two remaining tracks, there is good news and bad. The bad news is that you'll have to listen more carefully when comparing the mono version of **Sweet Dreams** on THE BOYS EP (again, this is the only mono source) or **I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Arthur** (the B-side of **The Warlord**) with those mock-stereo tracks on WALKIN'. It's plain to hear that the sound isn't the same. Mono mixes have a characteristic flatness to the sound and the image is firmly located in the middle. You'll find that these electronically expanded tracks give you a concert hall style reverberation, and certain high frequency sources such as the cymbals can often be heard away from the centre of the sound picture. Apart from that, there isn't always a lot to go on if the other instruments haven't been well separated.

On vinyl, **Sweet Dreams** comes in true stereo on THE SHADOWS AT THE MOVIES album and, **I Wish I Could Shimmy...** is in true stereo on the German double album THE BEST OF THE SHADOWS (1C 148-04 859/860) but it has never been available on a UK vinyl record. Both tunes have appeared only once in CD format in the UK and that was on THE EARLY YEARS boxed set. The good news – as mentioned before – is that they're both in true stereo on that set and are a sound revelation! Just listen to Bruce's engaging rhythm pattern so clearly heard on **Sweet Dreams**, with Hank's lead way out on the left. Most of all, enjoy that second guitar double-tracked on the right of **I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Arthur** – the resonant single-string 'boingy' sound is one of my favourites.

I still find it difficult to fathom just why it was necessary to reprocess these tracks at all. It seems that the stereo tape of **What a Lovely Tune** is “lost” so, that one’s fair enough – if not a little careless! What is much harder to reconcile is that the two EP tracks had both been available in true stereo on their original releases in October '62 (THE BOYS) and October '64 (RHYTHM ‘N’ GREENS) so they’d been around for years. **I Wish I Could Shimmy...** did eventually surface in stereo on that German album in 1972 so it is a puzzle.

LATER RELEASES

▣ The stereo reissue of THE SHADOWS GREATEST HITS album in 1971 gave us the third group of mock-stereo tracks and they were clearly marked (Ø) this time. Two hit singles from 1961 and 1962 respectively were joined by the eponymous EP track **The Boys** from late '62 as the targeted tunes this time. The tranche comprised:

FBI

Wonderful Land

The Boys

FBI and **Wonderful Land** are two of the better mock-stereo attempts and, without doubt, they are tracks we have become most comfortable with over the years. Somehow, it never seems to bother us that they are reprocessed mono, but both have actually been reprocessed twice and they are different in each case!

To explain: this fourth and last group of mock-stereo recordings was presented to us courtesy of Bruce Welch himself on the outstanding success story, THE SHADOWS’ 20 GOLDEN GREATS (EMTV3). On page 205 of his autobiography, Bruce relates that: “... *after the tracks had been chosen, I attempted to clean them up and modernise the sound by putting on mock-stereo; I tried to stretch the stereo image wider...*” and he is quoted in Mike Read’s book *THE STORY OF THE SHADOWS* (p.220) as saying: “... *I worked hard on that album, reprocessing it to mock-stereo to make it more compatible for modern equipment...*” The results of his efforts were the three tracks:

Foot Tapper

Wonderful Land

FBI

On the earlier SHADOWS GREATEST HITS album, **FBI** had been broadened out and was given an equal balance about the centre. In particular, the high frequency sound of the cymbals can be heard clicking away in each ear. Amongst other changes, Bruce’s later mix shifts this balance predominantly to the left – and it is often difficult to hear cymbals on the right. Bruce’s 20 GOLDEN GREATS mix is also used on the accompanying maxi-single (EMI 2573) and on the German vinyl LP GUITAR GIANTS.

Jim Nugent and I discussed the various versions of **Wonderful Land** and the probable genesis has now been explained by him in an earlier article. The mix of this track on **THE SHADOWS GREATEST HITS** locates the cymbals just slightly right of centre. Bruce's later mix puts them to the left, so you can tell the difference easily. Again Bruce's work appears on the maxi-single and **GUITAR GIANTS**.

Regarding **Wonderful Land**, it wasn't until March 1990 that we realised just what we'd been missing: a true stereo version. This true stereo recording was issued very quietly some 28 years after the Single on **THE SHADOWS ORIGINAL CHART HITS 1960 – 1980** release. In stereo Bruce's rhythm is clearly heard to the left, with the bass and the drums on the right, the positions being reversed on the **EVERYTHING OF VALUE (RARITIES II)** "no strings" version. At last though (in each case) super true stereo!!

To further whet our appetite – but to confuse the issue slightly – those lucky enough to have heard it know that **FBI** also exists in true stereo (oh yes!!) on the American LP **SURFIN' WITH THE SHADOWS** though the writer of a 'Viewpoint' response in *PIPELINE* magazine No.12 (January 1992) maintained that it was only reprocessed mono. My reservation is that **SURFIN' WITH THE SHADOWS** was issued in 1963, six years before **SOMETHIN' ELSE!!** Additionally, it wasn't until the mid-1960s that the big international record companies trumpeted the introduction of mock-stereo. To hear **FBI** in true stereo is as big a revelation as **Wonderful Land** was back in 1990.

On the six UK Shadows' CDs that contain **FBI**, the compilers seemingly preferred (and chose) the 'original' **SHADOWS GREATEST HITS** mix with its equal balance. Similarly, those UK CDs containing a mock-stereo mix of **Wonderful Land** (only three) also include the earlier mix. It is perhaps sad to relate that even the CD issue of Bruce's own compilation **THE SHADOWS 20 GOLDEN GREATS** includes both the earlier mock-stereo mixes from **THE SHADOWS GREATEST HITS** and a true stereo mix of **Foot Tapper** so it's really not the same as the original 1977 album. Be a little circumspect about disposing of your vinyl: CDs may contain the same track-listing, but sometimes they are not the same tracks at all! For instance, we know that **THE SHADOWS GREATEST HITS** album contains a mock-stereo mix of **The Boys**. As expected the symbols are spread towards the edges and, there is evidence of the bass being treated similarly – but it's the only place it exists. [The Australian LP/CD **THE SHADOWS FAVOURITES** features it. I.K.K.] Proper mono versions can be heard on a mono pressing of **THE BOYS EP** or the vinyl/CD issues of **THE SHADOWS IN THE 60s** – they do sound different to the mock-stereo ones, but it's not that easy to distinguish them. The CD issue of ... **GREATEST HITS** actually opts for a mono track, but more happily, you have a true stereo mix on the **SHADOWS EP COLLECTION VOL.II** (LP and CD) and on **THE EARLY YEARS CD** set.

As we've seen, Bruce's mock-stereo contributions included **Foot Tapper**, a tune which has two different versions. The original 'A' (or album) version emanates from Cliff's **SUMMER HOLIDAY** album released in January 1963, and it is easily identified by its fade-away ending. The 'B' version is the re-recording made specifically for **The Shadows Single** which

hit the No.1 spot in March 1963. This version is marked by a slightly slower tempo and an arranged ending.

Bruce's mock-stereo mix is based on the 'B' version as explained by John Friesen in the *PIPELINE* "Viewpoint" previously referred to. He said: "... it is true that a stereo mix was used for the albums *MORE HITS!* and *THE SHADOWS IN THE 60s*. However, Bruce felt the stereo mix lacked bass ..." It was in deference to Bruce's opinion that John chose a mono version of **Foot Tapper** for THE EARLY YEARS set. This statement perhaps throws some light on the sort of reasons why other mock-stereo mixes were produced. It is strange that John didn't choose Bruce's mock-stereo mix though.

For my money, and nothing whatever to do with this discussion, I happen to prefer the true stereo recording of the 'A' version, with its beautifully clear bass and double-tracking. Of all the Shadows' CDs, this only appears on THE SHADOWS EP COLLECTION VOL.II, whereas the 'B' version appears in either mono or stereo on all other CD issues. The stereo recordings whether 'A' or 'B' are preferable to the mock-stereo version of 'B' which has not yet made it onto the CD format.

OTHER RECORDINGS

▣ July 1989 saw the CD debut of THE SHADOWS GREATEST HITS, with a tiny note on the sleeve to indicate that **Midnight** was a mock-stereo track. Shortly after, a reviewer in *PIPELINE* No. 4 (January 1990) wrote: "...without a stereo take to use, **Midnight** suffered the same indignity of this technical disaster so that the album could come out under a stereo banner". He also wrote that: "...we get the ghastly reprocessed stereo version of **Midnight** where the phasing effect emphasises the snare drum echo to totally wreck the piece ... **Stars Fell on Stockton** received the same treatment ...".

Having listened carefully, I do not believe that **Midnight** is mock-stereo, and I think the sleeve note is probably a mistake. More importantly, it simply isn't true that **Stars Fell on Stockton** has been reprocessed; both tracks are true stereo. In each case the instrument separation is too pronounced, and this is not characteristic of a mock-stereo recording. For instance, **Midnight** has the drums and bass clearly in the left channel, the rhythm guitar in the right and Hank's guitar just right of the centre. This is exactly the same positioning that you will find on other stereo recordings of the period. By way of agreement, there is no doubting that the "phasing" on the reverberation is abysmal, but it can also be heard – less distinctly – on the mixed-down mono version, and you will hear exactly the same poor phasing at the end of **Quatermasster's Stores**: and no-one calls that recording a mock-stereo one!

Finally, there are a few other tracks worthy of note. Two of them, **36-24-36** and the so-called "talking introduction" **Maroc 7** can both be heard on the late-60s Dutch album THE BEST OF THE SHADOWS (5C 058-04300). I won't pretend that they have received the full mock-stereo treatment, however, they are to be heard with a lot more reverberation than any standard mono recording I've heard. Since "talking" **Maroc 7** was used as a promotional

Single and was intended to be played in cinemas, the extra echo is understandable, and it is particularly heard to advantage during the announcement itself, with Hank's voice booming at you from side to side. **36-24-36** can't be explained so simply although the sound does appear to have been widened. There is no apparent separation of the instruments on either of these tracks.

Now that the Shadows are in dormant phase (can we ever believe it's all over?) the opportunity to review their work has never been better and, there is still so much to learn and evaluate. For instance, I found it fascinating that the mock-stereo (and mono) recordings of **Wonderful Land** had received the heavy "dum-du-dum" bass drum beat (at the centre) when the orchestration was added and that this wasn't part of the original arrangement at all. The Shadows plainly approved of the sound, because they incorporated it into their Polydor re-recording in 1989: they just 'faked' it a little by building it into the bass guitar part. Equally, compare the stereo recording of **Shindig** on MORE HITS! with that on THE SHADOWS IN THE 60s album. On the first album it's not far off appearing to be mock-stereo because the separation is narrow, on the second it's very wide indeed. A similar situation exists with **36-24-36** on THE SHADOWS EP COLLECTION where the stereo is again very narrow (but only on the vinyl version) – the CD version appears quite normal.

I hope you enjoy listening; perhaps you'll be interested to re-read the article on Norrie Paramor's techniques, but most of all, perhaps you will rekindle your own interest in The Shadows' career now that we have a bit of a breather. It's a great time to consolidate our collective knowledge and pool our findings. For me, The Shadows will always be a bit of a passion, but I never thought I'd be able to share that – not until now!

Les Woosey © October 1993