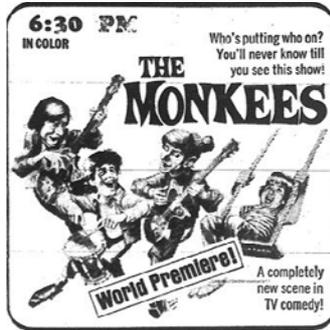




JUST FOR THE RECORD

by Dennis Barker



The Monkee's: Hey, Hey, We're The Monkee's

As a general rule, my grand children have little interest in what they condescendingly refer to as "Grampa's old junk". They will however, occasionally humor me for a few minutes, as I expound on this or that, but, their attention wanes quickly. We all know, it's just part of the price of a trip to the ice cream shop.

This one is for my Grandson Alec, whose exuberance reminds me of what once was.

Peter Allen said it best of course, "everything that's old is new again" I could almost hear the music coming from his ears. *Here we come, walkin' down the street, we get the funniest looks from, everyone we meet.....* I had encountered my grandson Alec, rifling through my albums, "you got any Monkee's records Grampa!?"

It seems those madcap minstrels of the 1960's are, thanks to cable TV, enjoying another reincarnation. And, their zany antics are right down my grandson's alley. Although I had assured him that I had some Monkee's albums somewhere, a search through record cabinets, closet shelves and boxes of records strewn around my office proved futile. Which, upon further thought, doesn't surprise me. In 1966, when the Monkee's exploded onto television, I was in High School, listening to the Stones & the Beatles, and hoping to purge myself of the very "monkeeish behavior" the TV band encouraged. But, if you were in the tween years during the late 60's, the Monkee's provided a weekly feast of the bubblegum music and slapstick behavior that feeds a twelve year olds soul.

Other than the awkward fact that Monkee's reeled off an impressive string of hit records during the 1960's, they weren't really a rock & roll band. They were a concoction of slick Hollywood PR and studio wizardry, invented to cash in on the burgeoning youth market. Even at that, they were second banana's, working on a concept had been developed based on *the Beatles* Hard Days Night Film, and filling the shoes of the *Lovin' spoonful* (who had rejected the project).

Micky Dolenz, Michael Nesmith, Peter Tork and Davy Jones came to the Monkee's via casting ads

placed in the Hollywood trade papers in mid 1965. Providing the music for the pilot episode, were bubble gummer's Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, who wrote and recorded four original songs (including the Monkee's theme). *Lights, camera, action.*

It was the Beatles meets the Marx Brothers..... In 1966, when NBC picked up the Monkee's pilot as a series, the creators were faced with four problems; Mike Nesmith, Peter Tork, Davy Jones and Mickey Dolenz. Two guitar players of modest ability, an English singer with one undistinguished album under his belt, and of course, Circus Boy. The daunting task of turning this troop of wannabe musicians into a functioning rock and roll band, eventually fell to Boyce & Hart, who had provided the music for the series pilot. It was a struggle. Jones, who had originally been tapped as the bands lead singer, was a drummer of sorts, but, due to his diminutive size, seemed to disappeared behind the drum kit. Dolenz, who emerged as the consensus choice for lead singer, had no other musical skills, so was given a crash course to turn him into a clubber. On top of that, Nesmith nor Tork were what you might consider "studio quality" guitarists. It got worse. As if their musical deficiencies were not enough, their disruptive behavior in the studio forced the producers to bring them in one at a time to lay down the needed vocal tracks. Nonetheless, soundtracks for the series were produced, and just weeks before the first episode of the Monkee's aired, the Monkee's would release their first single, the Boyce & Hart composition "*Last Train To Clarksville*".

The TV program about a zany rock & roll band aired on September 12th, 1966, and, on November 5th "*Last Train To Clarksville*" reached #1 on Billboards hot 100. The Monkee's, who had been hired as actors for a TV show, and, who had not even played the instruments on their first record, were now in competition with real bands like the Beatles, Stones & Beach Boys. It was fake. It was Madison avenue. It was surrealistic, and it was just beginning.

The Monkee's, no doubt, were a concoction baked from a television producers recipe. However, to get a little "fox newish" (*fair & balanced*), there is also little doubt that over time they improved as both actors and musicians. During 1966 & 67, the Monkee's toured, playing their own instruments, with only cursory help from *Boyce & Hart* and their band *Candy Store Prophets*. From the release of *Last Train to Clarksville* in 1966, until the cancellation of the TV program in 1968, the Monkee's, along with a cadre of studio musicians produced 18 singles and 5 albums, four of which reached #1 on Billboard. During 1967, the Monkee's sold more albums, than the Beatles.

*The local rock group down the street is trying hard, to learn there song.....*Without the TV show to hold them together, the Monkee's soon fell apart. A 1969 tour was unsuccessful, and Peter Tork left the group that year, followed by Nesmith in 1970. In the mid 1970s, Dolenz, Jones, Boyce & Hart toured as the *Golden Hit's of the Monkee's; the guys who wrote em', and the guys that sang em'*, which reinforces my feeling that the Monkee's were never much more than a Boyce & Hart alter ego. The Monkee's have, throughout the intervening years, tried this and tried that, in various configurations, but, it seems without the magic of TV to push them along, it never came to much.

The Monkee's, The Monkee's: Colgems #101 (mono) (RELEASED 1966)

Goldmine record album price guide values original first pressings of *The Monkee's*, with original cover & sleeve, in near mint condition, at \$25.00

To listen to the song, and related items, visit our website at: