

full of soul with no histrionics or unnecessary notes. The interplay makes it hard to believe they haven't been playing together a long time. Ford, Larry Goldings on organ, bassist David Piltch, drummer Harvey Mason, and Stephen Baxter on trombone form as cohesive a unit as you're likely to hear. The covers are great, especially sterling versions of "Fair Child" and the Sam Cooke classic "Fool's Paradise," as is Ford's own "Oh, Virginia." The latter continues the style of writing he's been refining since 1999's *Supernatural*. It's a ballad that walks a thin line between jazz and pop with gorgeous chord changes and a solo from Baxter that lends it a slight Burt Bacharach feel.

Ford's guitar work on the record is not heroic stuff. Great solos on every tune, but no blinding bursts of notes that make you lose your breath. Every solo is precise and soulful. He's tastefully spectacular on the record's only instrumental, "On That Morning." It's seven minutes of bliss.

This one may not have the fire some folks expect from a Ford record, but it smolders throughout with an understated brilliance that never falters.

— **John Heidt**



## Kris Kristofferson Feeling Mortal

KK Records

Kris Kristofferson, now 76 and a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, began a project in 2006 to summarize, celebrate, and reflect on his rich and varied life on a trilogy of albums produced by Don Was. *This Old Road* was the first, followed in 2009 by *Closer to the Bone*, both released by New West; this final volume appears on his own KK label.

Today, the voice, always weathered, occasionally veers off pitch (thankfully untouched by Autotune), yet Kristofferson's blunt iconoclasm that made him one of the Outlaw movement's vanguard artists 40 years ago, remains in all its raw glory. The proof: newer tunes like the deeply personal, reflective "Bread For The Body" and "You Don't Tell Me What To Do" reiterates the fact that age hasn't diminished his inner rebel. "Mama Stewart" reveals a 94-year-old woman at the end of life with great sensitivity.

"Castaway" is based on an actual incident Kristofferson witnessed while piloting helicopters around oil rigs along the Texas Gulf coast in the '60s. "Ramblin' Jack" honors a longtime pal, folk legend Ramblin' Jack Elliott. Two others are of '70s vintage. The drinking song "Stairway To The Bottom" chronicles one man's stark dissolution into boozy oblivion. It, like the affecting "My Heart Was The Last One To Know," co-written with Shel Silverstein, remain powerful compositions.



The Yardbirds today.

## Still Blueswailing

The Yardbirds were the most important guitar band of the British Invasion, if not *the* guitar band of the '60s. Their lineup boasted, in succession, the three guitarists who immediately come to mind when the term "guitar hero" is mentioned — Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Jimmy Page, the latter two briefly at the same time.

In the documentary *Glimpses*, in Disc 2 of this two-DVD set, Yardbirds rhythm guitarist Chris Dreja says that what fans call timeless is probably due to the group's blues-based but eclectic slant. Of all reunion bands touring today, the Yardbirds rank alongside the Zombies as arguably the best, even though the formidable shoes of the aforementioned guitarists have been passed down

a few times — currently to the very-capable Ben King.

Historically, it's the lead-guitar triumvirate that gets the most ink, but in the band's short heyday (1964 to '67) its repertoire also included some great songs — with originals like "Shapes Of Things" and "Over Under Sideways Down" and Graham Gould's "Heart Full Of Soul," along with covers of Bo Diddley's "I'm A Man," Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightning," and Tiny Bradshaw's "Train Kept A-Rollin'" — and this concert DVD shows just how great Dreja and original drummer Jim McCarty (now 67 and 69, respectively) have always been. They both follow and drive the intense, crescendo-building "rave-ups," as the band calls them. Although discussions of "group

improvisation" typically revolve around the Grateful Dead (though the Allman Brothers, Cream, and *Then Play On*-era Fleetwood Mac might have a thing or two to say about that), no one could best the Yardbirds' version.

The Yardbirds were essentially dormant for the better part of 35 years, with 2003's *Birdland* being the "follow-up" to 1967's *Little Games*. The current lineup features singer/harpist Andy Mitchell, bassist Dave Smale, and guitarist King, who, at 28, follows such reconstituted-Yardbirds guitarists as Dr.

Feelgood's Gypie Mayo and Hellecaster Jerry Donahue. In a Disc 2 bonus feature, King visits the Music Emporium in Lexington, Massachusetts, and displays some impressive hybrid picking on a Lowden F-25C and some nice bottlenecking on a resophonic, then fingerpicks Page's "White Summer" on a Veillette Gryphon short-neck 12-string. On stage with his Tele, King illustrates that the most important quality of being the band's lead guitarist is not mimicking its famed alumni but summoning the same near-reckless abandon they had.

The 15 live performances on Disc 1 include such old favorites as those mentioned above,

along with "I'm Not Talkin'," "Drinking Muddy Water," and "The Nazz Are Blue," as well as "My Blind Life," "Mystery Of Being," and "Crying Out For Love" from *Birdland* — all performed up to

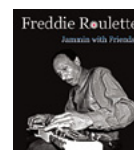
the Yardbirds standard, which is about as high as you can get. And along with interviews with McCarty and Dreja, Disc 2 includes the current lineup doing the Yardbirds' first-ever live performance of 1967's "Tinker Tailor Soldier Sailor."

It's hard to imagine that any serious rock fan or guitarist wouldn't want to own this. — **Dan Forte**



## The Yardbirds Making Tracks: On Tour, 2010 - 2012

MVD Visual



## Freddie Roulette Jammin' With Friends

Self-distributed

With the possible exception of panpipe player Henry Thomas, Freddie Roulette is possibly the oddest of odd ducks in blues history — and one of the most amazing. Playing Hawaiian-style lap steel, he's backed Earl Hooker, Charlie Musselwhite, and Harvey Mandel, and recorded

a handful of solo albums in a career approaching 50 years.

There have been other blues lap steel players (Hop Wilson, L.C. "Good Rockin'" Robinson, Sonny Rhodes, Ron Thompson, and even Jimmie Vaughan on occasion), but invariably they've adapted Elmore James' bottleneck style to Hawaiian guitar. Roulette (who inspired David Lindley to take up the instrument) comes from a completely different direction, infinitely more complex and confoundingly impossible to trace to any influence, at least not in blues.