

Live from California, it's the Electric Flag

MVD's new release pulls from live shows at L.A.'s Whisky A Go Go and San Francisco's Carousel Ballroom to showcase rock's first "super-group"

BY HARVEY KUBERNIK

THE ELECTRIC FLAG WAS ONE OF THE premiere rock bands during 1967-1968, organized by guitarist Mike Bloomfield, who had just left the Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

The Electric Flag featured drummer Buddy Miles, vocalist Nick Gravenites, bassist Harvey Brooks, and keyboardist Barry Goldberg. The group incorporated a full horn section in support of its searing blues and jazz based rock originals.

Sadly, egos and internal chaos prevailed and the group broke up after only two years of performing and recording.

During April 2018, RockBeat Records via MVD Entertainment Group continues the live show legacy of the Electric Flag with the long-awaited retail release, *Electric Flag: Live In California 1967-1968*. The CD is culled from shows at The Whisky A-Go-Go in September, 1967 and the Carousel Ballroom, San Francisco May 18, 1968.

I saw the band in 1967 and as a re-formed outfit in 1974. I later interviewed Bloomfield in 1978 for *Melody Maker*. The Electric Flag made deep impact on several people I know who still relish their 1968 debut Columbia Records disc, *Long Time Comin'*.

"I saw the Paul Butterfield Blues Band with Mike Bloomfield at the Golden Bear in Huntington Beach in 1966 with my friends Jack Nitzsche and Chris Varez, aka the Big Kahuna from radio station KHJ," remembered record producer and music manager, Denny Bruce, a friend of Bloomfield.



"Michael was exhausted from touring in a van 1965-1966 and wanted to have a musical group that could play all sorts of American music. And Michael was very aware in 1967 about the white rock audience that were moving from the AM to the FM radio dial. And soul music on the AM dial, in Los Angeles on KGFJ and all over the U.S. was very popular. It was the golden era of R&B. Particularly the great singles," Bruce underscored.

"Bloomfield explained, 'I don't hear guitar solos in this shit. I want a band that will be self-contained. Good guys, horns, and I can be based in Mill Valley, have a band of veteran guys that really don't give a fuck about touring. Musicians that know the shit so I can say an obscure R&B tune and I'm covered and don't have to

think about flying to Memphis for the Memphis Horns to overdub instruments.'

"I caught The Electric Flag's 1967 Whisky a Go Go gig," enthused Denny. "They were excellent. I had seen Otis Redding there, who had changed the musical complexion of Hollywood. We had the folk-rock stuff, for me to get an injection from Otis Redding, good players, and that's what Michael was trying to bring to people. And not a fuckin' guitar band. This is new R&B with a larger forum because his IQ and his knowledge of music was encyclopedic.

"On stage they were very good and they weren't loud and Michael was still playing through one amplifier. And he didn't have to solo or carry the burden like Eric [Clapton] with Cream and

the virtuoso guys. Mike's vision for the Electric Flag was Stax-inspired and his horns had to blow."

"At the June 1967 Monterey International Pop Festival, I thought the Mike Bloomfield Thing, the working name of Electric Flag, was very exciting," reminisced writer and drummer Paul Body. "To me, the 'Flag are sort of the Terry Malloy of that era of 60's. They had all of the ingredients to be monsters," Body lamented. "They could rock, they could be bluesy and they certainly had SOUL.

"At the Monterey International Pop Festival on Saturday afternoon I will never forget seeing them do 'The Night Time Is The Right Time,' the old Ray Charles number. Buddy Miles was killing it, sitting behind the drums looking like a giant tree trunk. The only group that looked cooler at Monterey Pop was the Jimi Hendrix Experience. They did that song 'Wine' and killed that one too. Stinging Bloomfield guitar, honking horns, keyboard and Nick the Greek on vocals. This was cool stuff.

"This might have been the very first 'super group,'" suggested Paul. "I was rocked to my socks. Later saw them on February 10th 1968 in Los Angeles opening for the Jimi Hendrix Experience and they were already a well-oiled machine.

"The first album came out and it was an instant classic for me, especially Barry Goldberg's 'Sittin' In Circles' which was a SOUL monster. By the summer of '68, Bloomfield was gone. By the end of the year they were almost

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a memory. The Electric Flag were fleeting, like shadow, almost but like Terry Malloy, they could have been a contender.
“Can’t wait to hear the live album.”

“From the ashes of The Paul Butterfield Blues Band arose the short-lived, quasi-super group, The Electric Flag in 1968,” reflected Gene Aguilera, East L.A. music historian and boxing book author. “I was in East L.A. heaven caught between the stinging lead guitar of Michael Bloomfield, soulful presence of drummer Buddy Miles, and the tight keyboard playing of Barry Goldberg as I placed the needle down on their first LP *A Long Time Comin’* on Columbia Records.

“I daydreamed about where Thee Midneters would have been in 1968 (had they not broke-up) while listening to the tight horn section that punctuated the Latin-tinged jam section of *Another Country*. I remember the beautiful blonde model adorning the album cover, bathed in a rich purple-hue, jumping out at me as I shopped in the record section of Unimart on Whittier Blvd.

“This multi-racial, Chicago based blues-soul band — carrying the moniker of ‘An American Music Band’ — quickly became a favorite of mine. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the record’s charming quirks: LBJ’s voice opens the album, Janis Joplin gets name-checked on the track “Wine,” and bizarre talk appears on *Another Country*. But I’ve harbored a deep, dark complaint since day one . . . who sang lead vocals on each track? The good old boys at Columbia should have listed this on the back cover, but never did, and it’s been a nagging mystery to me ever since. It’s time we found out.”

Harvey Kubernik’s 14th book, *The Doors Summer’s Gone* was just published by Other World Cottage Industries. His previous book, *Inside Cave Hollywood: The Harvey Kubernik Music InnerViews and InterViews Collection, Vol. 1* was published in 2017, by Cave Hollywood.



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