



## The Story of the Yardbirds: A Documentary

### [The Yardbirds](#)

Available from [Amazon.com](#)

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange

by **Mark S. Tucker**

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There could hardly have been a more daunting 60s group than the Yardbirds, a chartbusting monster, an ensemble touting no less than three gods: Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, and Jeff Beck...though most still don't realize that the soon-to-be-immortal guitarists had limited input in the writing of many of the band's hits. That was left to Chris Dreja, Jim McCarty, Keith Relf, and Paul Samwell-Smith, the true core. This DVD gives a way overdue visual and narrative overview of the phenomenon of the Yardbirds through various sources and perspectives, including band members Dreja, Clapton, McCarty, Page, Beck, and various others.

For those who grew up in the 70s, this DVD is a leap off the high dive into the deep end of the cultural pool, not a refresher course but a flashback, including a re-immersion in the progligate use of lipsynching and chopsynching during many of the live cuts (watch Beck especially!), a very common device now decried but then as expected as buttered toast. The difference between the soundtrack and guitarist hand actions is amusing, providing a chuckle, a grimace, and a knowing smile. The re-portraiture of the times, though, is refreshing for its "more innocent days" ambience, especially amid the corporate nightmare we presently endure, a return to utopianistic ambitions, the documentary serving as both more as tonic and reminiscence. The lion's share of back-cuts in black & white only reinforce the nostalgia factor.

Perhaps the most telling exposition point is the band's gig at what appears to be a baseball stadium in the States, an unvarnished, non-overdubbed, real-time take of the group's ability which more than erases the obsessive 60s TV need to overlay LP tracks onto real-time playing. Business dictates have ever been tin-eared, vulgar, and nowhere better shown than in this time machine, but that doesn't at all detract from the group or the Memory Lane excursion. Then again...just think what might have been had the mikes really been on! Ah well. And though documentaries traditionally don't feature song-length exposures, they can give tantalizingly extended cuts. *The Story of the Yardbirds* provides a number of meaty slices. Beck comes in for the lion's share, and a careful analysis can't help but convince the audient that he's purposely mucking about with the overdub he knows he's playing beneath. At times, it's almost hilarious.

Then we have the interview segments, and what proves to be the most engaging and refreshing are the interludes with Beck, who's straightforward and unpretentious, calling Michael Antonioni "a pretentious oaf" (which he was, with fairly gawdawful flicks) and naming spades as spades, revealing bottom-line events and motivations. Jeff was rightly irked that the director, in *Blow Up*, was using the Yardbirds as a symbol for the Who (wha?!?!?!), presenting a bourgeois view of the London scene, a snaky businessman's fantasy (welllllll, he didn't quite say **that**, but the inference is there—I'm supplying the rest). Even more amusing was seeing and hearing the swine Peter Grant connote that the swinish Mickey Most was a swine, reminiscing on how he, Grant, took over producership of the band.

In fact, a rueful reality is that the band, as several cuts explicitly state, was getting tired of being hustled—travel-wise, music-wise, producer-wise, and money-wise—and this ultimately proved the downfall and collapse of the ensemble, an all-too-common story. The hour-long documentary is a great overview of not only the Yardbirders themselves but also a peek into the business as well, not to mention a chapter in rock history, but there's a great bonus: a 14-minute non-edited recording of the German TV *Beat-Beat-Beat* show, which gives an uninterrupted looking glass backwards...with a strange revelation: Page is playing an electric 12-string minus two strings, isolating the lowest register for his bowing technique.

Last but not least, there's a substantial booklet in the package that ignores the past, which has been well covered in several books, and extensively chronicles the post-collapse and post-Box of Frogs period. It might at first seem a tad out of tune with the DVD, but, man, what a great set of insights and anecdotes, the bulk being direct quotes and related narrative by an uncredited writer talking to Chris Dreja. Oh, and ignore the misquoted song titles on the outside liner, they're rectified inside the booklet (and, no, the snafu wasn't the result of Japanese kitsch and mistranslation). I've inserted the *Hang On Sloopy* substitution here, as it was the Real McCoys, Rick Derringer's old 60s group, who popularized the tune—the real title is *My Girl Sloopy*.

## Featured songs:

- Louise
- I Wish You Would
- I'm a Man
- Heart Full of Soul
- Still I'm Sad
- Train Kept A'Rollin'
- Over, Under, Sideways, Down
- Shapes of Things
- Happenings Ten Years Time Ago
- For Your Love
- Hang On Sloopy
- Stroll On
- Dazed and Confused

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