

MESSAGE FORTHEWEEK

THE STORY OF THE YARDBIDS

1960's blues-rockers The Yardbirds were the first 'super group' of sorts, yielding three of the most influential rock/blues guitarists ever in Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck. Of course, all three of these six-string legends got their start in the Yardbirds, with both Beck and Page actually playing together in the band for a brief period. It had all begun very quickly for the band in 1963 when The Rolling Stones, who were the hottest "pub band" at the hip and trendy Craw Daddy's in Richmond, had a hit single break into the charts which subsequently took them on their first national tour.

With their rise and then departure from the local scene, the void was filled at the Crawdaddy by The Yardbirds. Featuring the late Keith Relf on vocals and harmonica, Chris Dreja on guitar, Paul Samwell-Smith on bass and Jim McCarthy on drums, this documentary chronicles the band's quick rise to fame and ultimate fall just six years later, offering perhaps the most complete collection of rare television appearances, archival clips and interviews of the Yardbirds ever compiled.

Interestingly enough, it also features more recent interviews with former members of the band, including Page, Beck, Clapton, Dreja, McCarthy and Samwell-Smith.

The Yardbirds were unique and one of the most important early rock bands in that they almost single-handedly bridged the gap between early 60's R & B influences and the heavier and more psychedelic sounds of the late 60's by churning 12-bar blues into hard driving rock. And the proof lies not only in the Yardbirds' sound, but also through the legendary bands that spawned from the band; Eric Clapton's Cream, the Jeff Beck Group and oh yeah, Jimmy Page's "New Yardbirds" which would become Led Zeppelin.

This hour-long documentary (originally produced for television in 1993) captures the power of the Yardbirds and the absolute frenzy they created in the London scene and even more so (eventually) America, but does not delve too deeply or give too much detail into any one phase of the band. However the relatively short film does feature many live and television appearances (between 1964-1967) from around the world including rare American, U.K., Belgium and Dutch TV clips as well as a 1965 appearance at the Richmond Jazz & Blues Festival in 1965.

The various clips cover every phase of their relatively short existence, including the songs "Train Kept A Rollin'," "Over Under Sideways Down," "Heart Full Of Soul" and "For Your Love." Various clips throughout feature individually Clapton, Beck and Page, however there is even a rare, three-song cult movie appearance with Beck and Page on stage together, which is the only documentation of the two guitar legends together as Yardbirds.

The video footage itself is a little rough and of course, black and white, but overall it is enjoyable considering the footage is some 40 years old. The audio is not great and certainly not digital quality, but once again, an enjoyable listen considering the age of this vintage content. The bonus footage is arguably the gem of the entire package however, featuring a 15-minute, four-song performance on the German television show Beat Beat Beat in 1967. The rare live gig features a very young Jimmy Page performing his guitar solo with a bow, a technique he would later make famous in Zeppelin's "Dazed and Confused".

The band that was notorious for cranking the rock-and-roll "rave up", a sort of no-holds-bar jam in the middle of a song, that builds up to a crashing crescendo before finishing the tune, the Yardbirds were arguably the first full-fledged rock band, paving the way for future generations of power-chords, metal riffs and rock guitar as we now know it today.

- Joe Milliken

