



STEWART/BECK/WOOD/WALLER IN EARLY 1968

# MY BECK PAGES

Rod Stewart sighed. "He's such a good guitar player... wish he'd give himself a kick up the arse".

Jeff Beck is one of the truly legendary figures in rock, but for a couple of years now, his legend has been rusting up... memories, rumours and fantasies are starting to distort the reality, and Beck is usually depicted either as the amazing guitarist whose brilliance wiped out any competition, or as the irrational bandleader racked by moodiness and indecision. To the current rock audience, he is a name floating around in search of a reputation... his present endeavours revolving around his new band, which has been rehearsing and recording at Island Studios during the past few weeks. We tried to get hold of Beck, but one has to do this through various channels, and, well, you know... negotiations for an interview (if you want to get high-flown) broke down somewhere between his management and the man himself. (Not that I'm surprised or annoyed - Beck must want something new and concrete to talk about, rather than go over the same old ground that he's covered in a thousand

and one interviews before). Anyway, Rod Stewart didn't mind talking about his old group, so he was able to clear up a few queries for us.

Though the records always seemed to fall somewhat short, the Jeff Beck Group (at its peak) of Beck, Stewart, Ronnie Wood and Micky Waller was just totally unbeatable. They didn't manage to achieve national superstar status in England (because they didn't get the opportunity to play here all that often), but they set America on fire: "most of us were just dazed - even the straights... devastating... passing an incredible new number off as a jam... they didn't come on as though they were playing for money, but like they were playing for people... they were unbelievable". The printed praise was seemingly endless... but the group was buffeted by turbulence through most of its 2½ years.

Right. First a precis of Beck's history (see ZZ 19 for Rod's): The Yardbirds, which he joined (from the Tridents and session work with Jimmy Page) in March 1965, when Clapton left to join

Mayall, was his "15th group". (I can't remember where I read this, but it seems a little exaggerated in view of the fact that Beck brushes away his pre-Yardbird days as being of no consequence at all). He named Ian Stewart, the Stones' roadie, as the person who originally turned him on to Chicago Blues and ideas of bottleneck playing. As a matching-suited Yardbird, he played a Telecaster; "I don't think I'd play anything else now", but within months he had switched to a Les Paul. His publicised 'likes' and influences ranged from Howlin' Wolf to Julie London, via Cliff Gallup (of Gene Vincent's Blue Caps), and his plans for the future included a solo recording of 'Summertime' and leading a big band with 3 guitars, 2 basses, 2 drummers, trumpet, trombone, etc. At the end of 1966, he was slung out of the Yardbirds, having just been voted the country's number one guitarist in one poll, and intimated that his future lay in films, though ambitions included co-producing with Phil Spector, sitting in with Ray Charles, and working with Ike & Tina Turner.

According to Beck in an interview

we did with him in August 1969 (when, I might add, he was the ultimate in friendliness - not a trace of this moodiness one hears about), he just packed up playing altogether after the Yardbirds... "I didn't even touch my guitar, and when I came to play again, I was hopeless, but I started to do session work again with Jimmy Page". That didn't last long, because a few weeks later he released his first solo single 'Hi Ho Silver Lining' - a piss-take song about plastic hippie chicks - backed with Jimmy Page's 'Becks Bolero' - featuring Beck, Page and Keith Moon. The single was cut under the direction of Mickie Most and "I was a star again; I didn't dislike the tune and I tried, but playing my style across a song like that just doesn't make it". Aesthetically, maybe not, but commercially it did - Beck was number 8 on the charts and a regular on Top of the Pops for a few weeks. But he needed a band to consolidate and capitalise on his success, and that was the start of his troubles.

ZZ (to Rod Stewart): Am I right in thinking that the first Jeff Beck Group was you singing, Beck and Ron Wood on guitars, Jet Harris on bass, and Viv Prince (in between gigs with the Pretty Things and Denny Laine's String Band) on drums?

Rod: That's exactly right...nearly. What happened was, we rehearsed first of all like that down in a place in Goodge Street, but for one reason and another (do you detect a spot of censorship here?) Viv and Jet couldn't make it, so that never came off. So, after a bit of deliberation, Ron switched to bass and the next drummer we had was Roger Cook (now with Blue Mink) - but he didn't stay long enough to do a gig either. Then we had a guy called Rod Coons, then Aynsley Dunbar, who really established the band

and helped get it off the ground, then Micky Waller, and finally Tony Newman. So there were 6 drummers altogether.

ZZ: I remember seeing Aynsley playing with you at the Windsor Blues Festival in 1967, but I don't remember those other two - what happened to them?

Rod: We just rehearsed with Roger Cook in a little studio, but before we did a gig, he went and this Rod Coons arrived. Well, the first gig we ever did - in early 1967 - was in Finsbury Park, and he just froze completely and couldn't play, so he had to go. I don't know what happened to him... it was a real shame actually, because his old man had bought him a brand new drum kit for the tour, and he was sacked the first day. Very sad.

According to Rod, his involvement with Beck came out of sympathy for him; "we thought we'd better help him out... I mean, for a guitar player like that to come out with a thing like 'Hi Ho Silver Lining' - it was a crime".

The formation of the group didn't stop the commercial singles however, and the follow up was a Graham Gouldman (he wrote the first Yardbirds' hits) song called 'Tallyman'. Most played the demo to Beck, who "didn't say anything, but just left it up to Mickie's judgement. I made the record and sort of closed my eyes". The song was cretinous - "shoes and socks, pretty frocks in the latest styles" - but both the Beck arrangement and the guitar were beautiful... some of his best work in my opinion - staggering stuff. Rod didn't agree: "that was the worst of the three", he said, scarcely controlling a sneer as he sung a line or two of it.

The b-side, 'Rock my plimsoul', was more indicative of the band as it was

then - Beck, Wood, Stewart and Dunbar - and Rod agreed that it was great, "but I really hate talking about those days"... the days of trying to thrust Beck to teeny bop stardom via hit 45s.

Shortly after that, Dunbar left to form his Retaliation and was succeeded by Micky Waller, who featured on the next, and last, single, 'Love is blue'/'I've been drinking'. 'Love is blue' was little short of diabolical - the sort of crap you're forced to listen to during the ice-cream flogging interval in suburban cinemas. What could Beck have been thinking about? Well, of course, the idea didn't stem from Beck's mind, but from that of Mickie Most, who, as producer, controlled his material selection.

"Mickie Most, let me tell you", Beck told us (in August 1969)... "all he wants to do is make hit records, and all I want to do is play my music. When 'Love is blue' was recorded, he was terribly difficult to work with - he really let me know who was boss. But when he went to the States and saw us play, and realised just how huge the market was, he did a big swallow and said "what have I been doing all this time?" And now, he's a lot more lenient as to what material we record; in fact, he's enjoying what we're doing now. He was going to invent an elixir for eternal life - you take a spoonful for breakfast and it makes you last forever. He hasn't invented it yet".

I also seem to recall Mickie Most saying that he was donating a proportion of his income to the Government as his contribution to the Back Britain campaign. But anyway, Most wasn't bothered what went on the b-sides, so they were consequently much better. 'I've been drinking again' had Hopkins on it (before he joined the group) and Madeline Bell, and is just beautiful... beautiful piano, beautiful sing-



Photographs of Stewart and Beck are hard to find, but here is one taken in early 1968. (courtesy Vibrations)

ing, beautiful guitar... beautiful.

(Around this time, I remember seeing the group with a different bassist - Wood was ill - but Rod remembers no other bass players except Dave Ambrose, playing with them).

The magnificent 'Truth' album came out during their first American tour and was immediately put down by Al Kooper in Rolling Stone. Beck wasn't worried, "... from the articles of his I've read, he talks out of his arse", but successful as it was, he reckoned that it was just sort of thrown together and included a couple of filler tracks just to make it a reasonable length. Rod held the album in higher esteem, though he agreed that they just went into the studio and bashed down a load of tracks that they'd been playing for almost a year - "but I really dug it at the time... even 'Greensleeves'".

Even so, the album came nowhere near to realising the pure amazement of their live gigs during that year of 1968.

Towards the end of the year, Nicky Hopkins, tired of reading the dots in the studio, decided to go out on the road with a band and chose Beck's in preference to Led Zeppelin, who had apparently offered him more money, but then, almost a day before an American tour in February 1969, Beck fired Wood and Waller - and that was the first nail in the coffin. "Their playing had deteriorated", Beck was reported as having said at the time.

This happened at the time when 'Beck Oia' was being recorded and came as a shock to Stewart, who seemed to think that Beck was behind Wood's removal and Hopkins had pushed for Waller to go. "Oh dear... silly boy, he really was... he's really got to go to get another band as good as that". Too true, mate.

In March 69, Beck, Stewart and Hopkins flew to the States to pick up the partly cancelled tour and took with them two replacements - Tony Newman (ex Sounds Inc and session man - now with May Blitz) on drums, and a bassplayer called Douglas Blake. After one gig, in Virginia, Blake was sacked and Ronnie Wood was rehired and flown out. Rod: "By that time, Ronnie was well pissed off and from then on he just used the group as a filler whilst he looked for another band".

ZZ: I read an interview with Tony Newman where he said that nobody in the band was happy with the way it was going. Is that right?

Rod: Yes it is. The band was together, it was a great band to be in, the music was great, but it was everything that went with it... the aggravations and unfriendliness that developed. It was getting too ridiculous for words towards the end when we were trying to escape from each other all the time... one would stay at the Hilton and the others would stay at Hotel Third On The Bill around the corner.

'Beck Oia' came out just as the group was breaking up finally, and this was the first record to acknowledge the fact that it was The Jeff Beck Group, rather than just Jeff Beck. The album was patchy, to say the least, and it was basically recorded to cater for the US sheep audiences - the group was under the impression that a rock'n'roll revival was about to sweep America and cut the appropriate songs.

When we interviewed Beck in August 69, the group was just dwindling apart. Nicky had left for the California sunshine and Ron Wood had found a gig with the Faces. Beck, however, hadn't

informed (and seemingly had no intention of informing) Tony Newman that his services were no longer required. "You ought to tell him Jeff", his girlfriend was saying... "Oh he'll find out" said Beck. Meanwhile, the big Beck plan was to reform with Rod and two members of the Vanilla Fudge - Carmine Appice on drums and Tim Bogart on bass. At the time, Beck was unwilling to divulge their names, because it was still a secret, but he brimmed with enthusiasm; "I nearly fainted on the floor when they phoned up".... he was totally flabbergasted by the tribute and honour he felt these cats were paying him. I think his adulation was a bit misdirected, because they couldn't hold a candle to the Newman/Wood rhythm section... and the Waller/Wood combination would have pissed on them.

ZZ: The end of the group was a very indecisive affair... it just fizzled out.

Rod: Yes - we just sort of floated apart really - I was worried about various things like management, the future, and Ron Wood had gone, which choked me off because we were getting some nice things together. As it happens, I wasn't really knocked out by the things the Fudge were doing at the time, though Carmine and Timmy were two incredibly nice guys. When a group breaks up, the usual line to come out with is 'we couldn't have gone any further musically'... well that's a lot of bollocks - me and Beck could've played together for years and still come up with nice stuff.

So, on October 25th 1969, Disc confirms the news that Rod Stewart had now officially joined the Faces along with Ronnie Wood, and that Beck was getting together with Appice and Bogart. But, it was never to be - as Carmine Appice relates in this excerpt from an interview which appeared in the New Haven Rock Press:

Carmine: When me and Tim left the Fudge, we were going to get a group together with Jeff Beck and Rod Stewart, but their managers weren't going to go through with it. See, Jeff wanted a group to compete with Led Zeppelin because he was mad at them for taking his thing and popularising it and taking all the credit. So he was bitter and wanted to form a group, rather than Beck and his boys, but the managers weren't going to make as much money. Then Beck got in that car crash. (Which is true enough, though Carmine & Timmy had already joined Cactus by then).

NHRP: I heard that Beck did some Motown work....

Carmine: From what I understand, he just went there to cut an album with some studio cats but didn't like the way it came out and he's not going to release it.

Well, that's one version - I've heard other stories, but since we couldn't get Beck to corroborate or deny rumours, that'll have to suffice as an explanation. But one thing we do know - Beck caused the Fudge to break up.

ZZ: Is it right that the Fudge split up because you wiped them off the stage one night and they just felt they had to give up?

Rod: So they say, yes. We did a gig in New York which ended up in what they call 'The nine man jam'; the stage was full of people including Bonham, Page, Beck, me and Plant, and the guy who used to play bass with Jethro Tull - we were doing 'Jailhouse Rock', and it was fucking incredible. I finished the whole thing by shoving a mike stand up John Bonham's arse and he got arrested - the

cops pulled him off and I ran away... we were all pissed out of our heads. And the Vanilla Fudge couldn't follow it on... just couldn't, and they packed up that night. A few days later, Carmine and Timmy got on the phone to Beck and said they wanted to form a band, keeping me on as well.

Though Stewart admired Beck tremendously as a musician, the group was a disaster socially. Rod admitted that in the 2 1/2 years he was with the band he never once looked Beck in the eye... he always looked at his shirt or something.

I asked him if Beck was as directionless as it seemed - whether Stewart was in fact the pilot.

Rod: No - I think he gave me as much direction as I gave him. In the early group, Dunbar used to lead if anyone did - most of the ideas came from him - and then towards the end, Tony Newman came out with a lot of ideas... like the original 'Plyth' was his idea, though it was me and Ron's chord sequence, etc.

Well, as Carmine mentioned, Beck was involved in a car crash, went to do some recording in Detroit, which didn't work out as planned (though one track may get released), he heaved up Donovan's 'Barabajagal' (again under Most's direction), and he has apparently spent most of his time since then in search of a new band. He got Birmingham drummer Cozy Powell fairly early on, but has literally been combing the globe for a singer and a bass player. Snoopy (see else where in this issue) said he went for an audition with a vocalist who said he had rehearsed with Beck and got the boot... reckoned he was one of a number. But as mentioned earlier, it seems as if a new Jeff Beck group is at last a reality and that Beck is satisfied with Clive Charman on bass and Alex Ligertwood singing.

Rod became remorseful and sighed once more; "I've said so many nasty things about Beck and yet they're fucking true... but it's very easy to kick someone when he's down, do you know what I mean?"

"But he'll be up again in a couple of months - he's got a new band".

"No chance. Woody saw him the other night (this was at Easter) and you know what? He had the cheek to ask him to join him again!"

So, make what you like of that... but pray that he gets off again this time; I really miss Jeff Beck. Mac

#### Records:

|                                   |          |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Hi Ho Silver Lining/Beck's Bolero | DB 8151  |
| Tallyman/Rock my plimsoul         | DB 8227  |
| Love is blue/I've been drinking   | DB 8359  |
| Truth                             | SCX 6293 |
| Beck Oia                          | SCX 6351 |

See also Sounds Talk-in in their May 1st issue, where Beck is interviewed about his new group, his past and his future.

