

THE YARDBIRDS

BLOW YOUR



Way back in the 1940s there was a man they called Yardbird. Charlie 'Bird' Parker was so way ahead of his time that his influence is still strongly felt by most musicians playing jazz today, so what better name could there be for a group ahead of their time than the Yardbirds?

I hesitate to call them a 'pop' group, for although, like everyone involved in showbiz, their prime purpose is money-making - in their case through the medium of hit records - the Yardbirds are an adventurous fivesome, busily engaged in putting a new face on music. After all, who could have visualized a couple of years ago that anyone could make a hit out of a Gregorian chant? The Yardbirds took a gamble and did just that with *Still I'm Sad* which was based on the thirteenth century musical style and produced by their bass guitarist Paul Samwell-Smith, the mastermind of the group.

MiND



BUT WHY?



When the Yardbirds first appeared on the club circuit some three years ago, they played blustery R'n'B and little else. Lead singer Keith Relf looked so like Brian Jones from a distance that anyone could be forgiven for dismissing them as nothing more than Rolling Stones' copyists. And for a while they were just about that. They played the same clubs where the Stones had made their name, took most of their material from the Chuck Berry/Bo Diddley files, and waved maracas about in the best approved Stone-age manner. No one thought the Yardbirds would outlive the beat boom.

But they did, for behind the tag of 'most blueswailin' and so on, five active brains were ticking over, brains which saw that the path to the future lay through fields of variety. Today, says Relf, main spokesman for the group, the Yardbirds still play R&B - "but it's developed in our own way."

The usually silent lead guitarist Jeff Beck chipped in. "It's not Negro R&B, it's more Rhythm 'n' Yardbirds!" Beck, generally considered one of the best on his instrument, continued. "We started out by trying to get as close to the authentic sound as possible, but as we matured musically, we realized how invalid this attitude was, both musically and otherwise. So we've used it as roots of our musical progression."

Although the Yardbirds are not particularly interested in jazz as such, their approach to their music includes plenty of improvisation wherever possible. "There are some sections in our numbers where we improvise on stage," said Paul Samwell-Smith, generally known for convenience as 'Sam'. "If the spark is there, we'll play it differently every night."

Currently, the Yardbirds are working on individual records which will be ap-

pearing quite independently from the group's singles. Sam, the man, behind the Gregorian chant idea and the use of Indian-flavored sounds on *Heart Full Of Soul*, hopes that their next production will be a four-and-a-half minute long song in different movements. "We want to have the classical attitude in mind of starting with a statement, improvising on that and then going into a final statement which is a combination of these two parts. *For Your Love* was a bit like this, but we hope that people will be interested in what we're doing."

Another of the Yardbirds' claims to fame is in their use of such artificial sound-producing devices as feedback, echo and the fuzz-box. Most British groups, particularly The Who, top London group who were instrumental in introducing feedback as a means to an end, employ these techniques but few people are aware of their origin. Jeff Beck claims to have used feedback as long as four years

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ago. "The first time you get it is when you lean your guitar against the amplifier for a minute and the sound goes on and on," he said. "Your immediate reaction is to rush over and turn it off. You think it'll hurt the instrument, but after a while you find out that it can contribute something. I like using different effects and noises, it's one way of covering up bad playing!" he smiled. "But it's something very hard to control, and it's hard to do it in tune.

"I was using echo long before anybody else, too. The Who used to come down and listen to us playing all the time. That's where they got their ideas. Fuzz-box is very handy, too. You can extend one note just like a saxophone, and sometimes you can get sounds just like an oboe or a bassoon.

"We don't mind if people do the things we do, in fact we're flattered, but we do get mad when someone claims that they originated something that we do."

The Yardbirds made their last trip to the States in December, and at the time of writing, they hope to return in May. This time they hope to be granted an H1 visa instead of the restricting H2 which allowed them to make only a small number of television appearances. Although they enjoy visiting the States, they are all adamant that they would not like to live there. Drummer Jim McCarty summed up their attitude by saying, "The country people are nice and relaxed, but the city people are just like machines and that's not for us. The audiences were good but not as good as they are in London. They're responsive, but they don't really know what we're doing."

Sam added: "White kids don't know anything about R&B. Or maybe they just know Tamla Motown. It's so different at home."

"White people aren't really too bothered about Negroes in the States, anyway," said Jim. "It's a pity, but that's the way it is."

The Yardbirds, like so many British pop groups, are ardent admirers of all the leading R&B merchants like Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf and so on, and would dearly love to see their idols accepted and appreciated by their own fans. "But," said Keith sadly, "I don't really think that our treatment of R&B will really inspire anyone to listen to the real thing."

One thing about the Yardbirds is their self-assurance. This comes from an awareness of their combined abilities and limitations and makes for a pleasantly



Above, sneaky Paul says "Arf, Arf" unknown to the rest of the boys. Isn't that silly? Oh that Paul. Right, Jeff proudly displays a coat with red Indian styled lining which he bought Stateside during their last tour. Below, Paul and Jeff get a bit of a giggle from a magazine article about the Yardbirds. Their latest Epic single "Over, Under, Sideways, Down" utilizes the now familiar near Eastern sound.



confident but far from conceited attitude. When guitarist Chris Dreya said, "We're looking forward to going back and conquering the States," no-one could doubt for a moment that this was anything but a joke.

"We've come to the point now where we're sitting around, taking stock of ourselves and waiting for ideas to come to the surface," he went on.

Keith took it up there. "There are a lot of ideas buzzing around which will have to be tethered and made use of. We

feel there is a place on the market for fun records, coming after the wave of protest, there should be room for some good-time music. I hope we can provide some of it."

Whichever way the Yardbirds move - towards good-time music, across to India or back in history to the days of Gregorian chants - their reasons for doing so will be worthwhile and the products of their thought interesting. They are the most adventurous group on their side of the pond and, for the record, the most polite. □

YARDBIRD

Fact Sheet

- Keith Relf (vocals and harmonica, tambourine and mike stand) was born on March 22nd, 1943, in Richmond, Surrey. Has blond hair, blue eyes, loves animals and is expert at faking wormholes in antique furniture.



- Jeff Beck (lead guitar, violin, electric saw) was born on June 24th, 1944. Has brown hair, blue eyes and is most desirous to own a big American car.



- Chris Dreja (rhythm guitar, maracas, foot) was born November 11th, 1945 in Surbiton. Has blond hair, blue eyes and undoubtedly the best-dressed man on the scene.



- Paul "Sam" Samwell-Smith (bass guitar and baffoon) was born "somewhere in South-West London" on May 8th, 1943.



- Jim McCarty (drums, triangle-beer cans and bath stoppers) was born in Liddypool July 25th, 1943. He spent two years in the stock-exchange rat race, and considers showbiz "a piece of cake."

