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The Yardbirds' Jim McCarty: "There Were Several Layers of Discontent"



Trevor Heath
The Yardbirds

The **Yardbirds** hold a special place in the history of rock and roll. Over the course of some fitful years in the mid- to late 1960s, the band featured the talents (separately) of Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy

Page. During that time, the Yardbirds made several classic albums and even managed to hit the pop charts with songs such as "For Your Love" and "Shapes of Things."

Reformed and touring once more since the mid-1990s, drummer Jim McCarty is the only original member of the band still in the lineup. Speaking from Toronto while doing some solo recording, McCarty talked with DC9 about the past and future of the Yardbirds and how the band is looking forward to coming to Dallas -- they'll be at the Granada Theater this Wednesday -- for the first time since 1966.

DC9 at Night: Will there ever be another Yardbirds album?

McCarty: I don't know. It's always possible. The latest idea is that we might do a blues album. We were even thinking of recording it in Tennessee. I don't know if that will come off. It will be a collection of blues covers. I hope we can have some fresh, original songs as well. That is the latest that we have talked about.

Seeing that there are many blues-based artists making commercial inroads today, is the significance of the Yardbirds as strong as ever?

I would say so. There still seems to be a long memory and the fans are very loyal. We haven't been to Dallas since the '60s. We reformed the band in 1995 and we've been playing around ever since. But we haven't made it down there. The only time [in Texas] was at SXSW in Austin in 2003.

Didn't Jeff Beck leave the band after that show in Texas in 1966?

That's right. I think we might be coming back to the exact spot.

Does having the Yardbirds' version of "I'm a Man" being used on *The Simpsons* make the band a cultural as well as a

musical icon?

[Laughs] It was always a great, fast version of the song. We were lucky to have it get picked up. That was fun. It went through the record label in Los Angeles, Favorite Nations. I think the people from *The Simpsons* contacted the label. The record label told us about it and, of course, we were very happy about it.

What was it like working with such legendary guitarists as Beck, Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page?

Each one had their own individual thing. Eric was the blues purist. He was very loyal to the blues. Jeff had much more variety in his playing. He played anything from blues to jazz with all sorts of effects. Jimmy was very good at creating riffs. He was creative in his own way, but he was also very businesslike.

Did Clapton leave the band because of the success of the single "For Your Love"?

Yes, but it was before we were successful. He left because his idea for the band was to cover blues songs. He would rather do a Motown song than something like "For Your Love." We all thought it was a good song and it was commercial. We all liked it. That's where we differed and he left. There was a lot of aggravation going on in the band anyway. It was more than just the success of the song. There were several layers of discontent going on.

The band first broke up in 1968. Has there always been this element of animosity within the Yardbirds?

We went up and down. It was all about the fact that we were on the road the whole time. In the last lineup, the one with Jimmy Page, that was kind of calm. That worked very well. Even though we were traveling around in a Greyhound bus and we didn't have much time

off, it did seem to go quite smoothly. When Jeff and Eric were in the band, we had more problems because they were destined to be their own men, really. They wanted to be solo artists and they found it very difficult working in a band.

Do you still have contact with all Clapton, Beck and Page?

Yes, but not so much recently and not so much with Eric. But with Jeff and Jimmy, I've always had contact fairly regularly. Sometimes, they come to a gig and sometimes we see them at funerals and weddings.

"For Your Love" was written by Graham Goulding of 10cc. How did you come across that song?

It was in the days of demo discs. Publishers used to collect these demo tapes. We had actually just played with the Beatles at a Christmas show in 1964. They used to do a Christmas show every year in London. We played on the same bill in Hammersmith Odeon. We played our set and there was this publisher there who had the demo for "For Your Love." He got in touch with our manager and we went from there.

Various members of the Yardbirds came together as Box of Frogs in 1983. Did that band ever tour the U.S.?

No, and that was a shame. That was a lot of fun. It was a reunion, but we decided not to call it the Yardbirds. Even Jeff Beck played on quite a few tracks on the first Box of Frogs album. We had a lot of fun, but unfortunately, some of the guys were very busy at the time. They didn't really want to tour. That would have helped the record a lot. Even without touring, that record did make some inroads.

2003's *Birdland* featured, among others, Joe Satriani and John Reznik from the Goo Goo Dolls.

Yes, that was fun. We were looking for a record label and through friends got connected with Steve Vai. He found a label for us and the idea was to do an album of original material with the band we had with some famous guest stars. It worked rather well. There were some great people on that album.

Can you talk about the return of Top Topham to the band?

Unfortunately, Chris Dreja was in the reformed band, but he had a stroke in 2011. That was on the road. He got into quite a state and since that time he hasn't been out to play. Rather than just me playing with some young guys, I thought it was a good idea of being more authentic by bringing Top back in. He is a great guy that I've known forever. He is a nice player and he adds a lot to the band. Now, we have Top playing Chris' parts, but he also plays lead guitar as well, which is quite unusual. It is very odd for him to come back after all that time. He didn't play on any of the hits and now he is playing them on stage.

The Yardbirds perform with **The Roomsounds** on Wednesday, June 25, at the Granada Theater.