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# The Yardbirds — rock of all ages



Jim McCarty laughs at the question.

After all, it's a natural one to ask a man who started in rock in the mid-1960s and whose band now includes musicians in their early 20s.

“Yes, they’re young,” McCarty says, “but they’re very good musicians — and they’ve got the energy that we need.

“But, yes, they’re young. One of them told me his mom was just five when The Yardbirds started.”

That was back in 1963, when a group of musicians in England came together, did a few gigs as the Blue-Sounds, then changed their name, drawing the inspiration from both the writings of Jack Kerouac — he used the word to describe hobos hanging around railyards waiting for trains — and in homage of jazz saxophonist Charlie “Yardbird” Parker.

McCarty, the band’s drummer, came to music via a high-school band that preferred a playlist of Elvis Presley, The Everly Brothers and Gene Vincent.

But, once he heard the Mississippi blues of Jimmy Reed, “I knew that was really the music I wanted to play.”

The Yardbirds steeped the music in the blues, McCarty says, but experimented with other genres and techniques, as well.

The band was one of the first to experiment with feedback, distortion and variations on amplification, for example, and McCarty in particular became known for his innovative drumming style.

And, as rock fans know, The Yardbirds also provided a musical stop for guitar icons Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page and gave the world songs like For Your Love, Heart Full of Soul, Over Under Sideways Down and Shape of Things.

When the band broke up in 1968, McCarty stayed with music, joining Renaissance, Shoot, Illusion, Pilgrim, the British Invasion All-Stars

and his own Jim McCarty Band.

In the mid-1990s, McCarty was approached by a management company to reform the band, but wouldn't do it unless original co-founder Chris Dreja would agree.

Once that happened, the pair added some new musicians and headed out on tour with the reformed Animals.

"I remember one time when we were on tour with the Animals," McCarty says, "and I was quite shocked because one of the places we were playing was a casino.

"I thought, 'This is really odd' because we were playing in the middle of all these machines.

"It was very strange but it was very good, too. They are quite nice places to play."

Although he's well into his sixth decade of living, McCarty says touring isn't so bad because it's nothing like it was when the band first hit it big.

"It's not full on like in the '60s, when we were playing every night relentlessly.

"Now, we do eight or 10 dates and then we have a rest, which really suits me."

They still tour, though, because "we all love to play" and the shows cross generations, with fans who, like some of the new band members, weren't even born when the Yardbirds first hit the road.

Canada — and, in particular, Toronto — holds fond memories for McCarty who, just a few years ago recorded *Sitting on the Top* of

Time there.

“I used to do some tours of the [United] States and then I’d go up to Toronto to do the album.”

Asked to pick his favourite Yardbird song, McCarty doesn’t hesitate.

“Shape of Things,” he says.

“I think it incorporates all the best bits of The Yardbirds.

“It’s a good song that highlights the lead guitarist [Jeff Beck, when it was first recorded] and has some interesting time changes and rhythms.

“And, we all wrote it together. I think it really highlights the ‘60s.”

The Yardbirds are at the Kamloops Convention Centre on Friday, April 13, for a 19-plus show.

Tickets are \$35 plus taxes and service charges and are available at the venue’s Ora Restaurant, by calling 250-372-5312, or at the Kamloops Live Box Office, 1025 Lorne St., 1250-374-5483, kamloops

live.ca.