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## Rock On! with Danny Coleman



Jim McCarty

Welcome to my musical world! This is one man's attempt to alert you to the best in area entertainment!

In the early 1960's, a band formed with its roots near London, England by Paul Samwell Smith, Keith Relf, Chris Dreja, Top Topham

and Jim McCarty. This group didn't have a name until after its initial gig when the headliner Cyril Davis asked Relf the band's name; he replied, "The Yardbirds" and the rest is history.

Now just for the record, the term "Yardbirds" was used to describe people who travelled the U.S. on old steam cargo trains and lived in rail yards. The band was well travelled, but far from living in rail yards. The original incarnation with Topham on lead guitar was short lived, and so began the parade of amazing guitarists who began their journey to rock music's "legend" status by spending time in The Yardbirds. The band's lineup at times featured the likes of Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page on guitar and achieved great notoriety with all three prior to their own highly successful careers.

Earlier this week I had the opportunity to chat with "Rock 'N' Roll Hall Of Famer" Jim McCarty, who after all these years is still performing both as a solo act and with the latest reincarnation of The Yardbirds. Jim is coming to the area with a scheduled performance on April 29 at The Strand Theater in Lakewood, N.J. McCarty tells me that the show will be comprised mostly of his solo material and "some previously pre-recorded things" as he is accompanied by former Renaissance, Illusion, Nashville Teen keyboardist and Metuchen resident John Hawken.

The following is a brief Q & A that I had with McCarty as he filled me in on The Yardbirds past and present.

Rock On: Without dwelling too much on the past, what guitarists were in The Yardbirds at once, as in at the same time?

McCarty: "Jeff and Jimmy were briefly together for several months in the group; but it didn't always work. I mean, you'd think it'd be a wonderful lineup, but there was a clash of styles. Jeff was very, should we say "loose" and care free; Jimmy was a session player and much more organized; he would have everything well thought out.

Where as Jeff never seemed to know where his next (solo) was coming from; this sometimes caused conflict and was a bit of a cacophony on stage.”

Rock On: What was it like to actually work with Clapton, Beck and Page?

McCarty: “Eric was different, quite dedicated to the blues. He would practice these old blues riffs amongst other things for long periods of time. Eric was also very image conscious, enthusiastic about his look; the rest of us didn’t really care (laughing). Jeff on the other hand was quite happy to perform in jeans and a dirty ol’ jacket; you could see the difference in their styles right there.”

Rock On: I grew up a total Led head. What was it like to work with Jimmy Page? What led to Beck leaving the band?

McCarty: “As I said before, Jimmy was very organized, he originally started on bass guitar but switched to lead guitar. Yes, Jeff eventually left the band in part because of the clash with Jimmy, but he also had some other things of a personal nature, so he left to other pursuits.”

Rock On: After Beck’s departure, what was next for the band?

McCarty: “Jimmy Page, when Jeff left, became more predictable. The band became quite calm, more business like, but in my opinion a bit less creative; looking back on it now, some things were better in many ways.”

Rock On: So that was then, and this is now. I wasn’t aware that The

Yardbirds were still touring let alone putting out new music. Tell me about it?

McCarty: “(laughing) Yea, in 2003 we did an album, “Birdland” on the Steve Vai label. We were lucky to have such great players join us on the record. Steve Vai, Jeff Beck, Joe Satriani and Slash all contributed. In 2009 I put out “Sitting On The Top Of Time” which was based a bit more around keyboards. I have (Genesis member) Steve Hackett on this one as well. The Yardbirds, we still do as many shows as possible, when time calls for it. We did a tour in September of the east coast and we did some filming for a DVD that we plan on releasing. We are taking the best versions of each of the songs, and making it a documentary as well.”

Rock On: Who is in the current Yardbirds line up?

McCarty: “I played drums on this tour and a bit of guitar. Ben King plays lead, at seven years with the band he’s the longest consistent member. Dave Smile and Andy Mitchell have been with us for three years each. Chris (Dreja) was touring with us until recently; he’s taken ill after a series of strokes.”

Rock On: What can the fans expect at your Strand Theater show on the 29th.?

McCarty: “(laughing) It’s going to be a bit of an experiment. I’ll be doing solo material with some Yardbirds bits thrown in here and there towards the end. I’ll be playing some drums, but mostly guitar. I like the singer/songwriter a bit more; I liked writing my songs so I like to sing them as well. My band is some fine Canadian session players, I haven’t played with all of them yet, but I’m told they’re all very good

(laughing). With John (Hawken) living in Meteuchen, it makes it easy playing in New Jersey. I think the show will be a good one.”

Rock On: Going backward one more time, do you ever speak with Clapton, Beck or Page?

McCarty: “Oh yea, yea, well Jeff played on one of my albums. I haven’t seen him in awhile, but when we do we get together and laugh about that a bit (laughing).”

My time spent talking with Jim McCarty was extremely interesting, very informative and much too short. I learned little tidbits such as The Yardbirds hit song “Shapes Of Things” which McCarty calls, “A good song,it had meaning, good lyrics, the guitar solo...” was recorded in Chicago, Il. Jim went on to tell me with a laugh and a sense of pride of all of the bands who have covered that tune; most recently being The Scorpions. Over all it was a pleasure talking with this Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame member, I wish him the best and look forward to hearing more from him and The Yardbirds in the future.

This show at The Strand (Center For The Arts) Theater is a “Backstage Pass” show and seating is limited to 165 persons. The “Backstage Pass” allows the audience to sit on stage with the performers and these shows tend to sell out rather quickly. The show starts at 7 p.m., doors open at 6 p.m. and tickets are only \$25. To find out more information on this show, please go to [www.strand.org](http://www.strand.org) , to read more about Jim McCarty, his music as well as his history with The Yardbirds, please go to [www.jimmccarty.co.uk](http://www.jimmccarty.co.uk) .