

The Music Collector's Magazine

# Goldmine

November 3, 2015

## The Yardbirds deliver a “most blueswailing” show at B.B. King’s in NYC



Composite image © Trevor Heath  
Johnny A. photo by Brian Malloy

The current lineup of The Yardbirds (shown here) performed a blistering set at B.B. King’s in New York City on Monday, November 2nd. (Photo by Trevor Heath)

By John Curley

The Yardbirds have a long and storied history, and were part of the “British Invasion” of bands that broke out of the UK in the 1960s. The blues/rock band split up in 1968 and were inactive for many years until 1992 when founding members Chris Dreja (rhythm guitar) and Jim McCarty (drums) assembled a new version of the band to perform under The Yardbirds banner. The latter-day version of The Yardbirds have gone through numerous lineup changes over the years. Dreja departed The Yardbirds in 2013 due to medical reasons, which left McCarty as the sole original member of the band. While The Yardbirds were once an all-British outfit, the current lineup is four-fifths American with McCarty the Englishman in the band. In addition to McCarty on drums, The Yardbirds are now comprised of John Idan on guitar and lead vocals, Johnny A on guitar, bassist Kenny Aaronson, and Myke Scavone on backing vocals, blues harp, and percussion.

The Yardbirds’ latest tour brought them to B.B. King’s in New York City on Monday night, November 2nd. Following a well-received 40-minute acoustic set by singer-songwriter Jann Klose, The Yardbirds took the stage and tore right into an absolutely stonking version of “Drinking Muddy Water.” The band was firing on all cylinders. McCarty was pounding the drums as if his life depended upon it, the guitars were sharp, and the blues harp howled.

The set was packed with highlights. New lead guitarist Johnny A distinguished himself early on in the show with some scintillating guitar work on “I’m Not Talkin’.” Idan and Johnny A played very well off of each other during a terrific take on “Heart Full of Soul” that also featured strong backing vocals from Scavone. The performance of “The Nazz Are Blue” had an incredible twin guitar attack courtesy of Johnny A and Idan as well as soulful blues harp by Scavone. McCarty’s drumming on “Mister You’re A Better Man Than I” was superb. “I Ain’t Got You” was a positively ferocious bit of blues/rock while “Little Games” featured strong drumming from McCarty, pulsating bass by Aaronson, and great percussion work from Scavone. The band then segued right into a storming “Shapes of Things” that had a fantastic lead vocal by Idan, searing lead guitar from Johnny A, and thundering drums by McCarty.

McCarty took on lead-vocal duties for “Back Where I Started,” a track that he had recorded in the 1980s while a member of Box of Frogs. In addition to McCarty, that band included original Yardbirds Chris Dreja on guitar and Paul Samwell-Smith on bass. The performance of “Back Where I Started” at B.B. King’s was terrific and was highlighted by Johnny A’s fretwork and Scavone’s blues harp mastery.

The best part of the show was the searing take on “Over Under Sideways

Down” that was anchored by Johnny A’s topsy-turvy lead-guitar work. A good bit of the crowd shouted “Hey!” on cue when required by the song.

The guitar tandem of Johnny A and Idan was very effective on “Smokestack Lightning,” a performance that also featured stellar drumming from McCarty. For “Train Kept A-Rollin’,” The Yardbirds were augmented by Jon Paris on second blues harp and co-lead vocal. Paris has a Monday night residency at Lucille’s Grill at B.B. King’s and was terrific in his moment in the spotlight with The Yardbirds. When the song had concluded, McCarty told the crowd that Paris had been the one that recommended Aaronson to the band when they were looking for a new bassist.

The main set concluded with the triple threat of “For Your Love,” “Happenings Ten Years Time Ago,” and “Dazed and Confused,” a track that The Yardbirds had recorded before Jimmy Page took it to Led Zeppelin with him and turned it into a rock classic. The three songs were a really effective way to end the set, as The Yardbirds kept upping the ante as they delivered explosive performances of the trio of classics. “Happenings Ten Years Time Ago,” in particular, was the standout of those three songs, just spectacular.

After leaving the stage briefly, the band returned for a two-song encore of covers that included takes on Sonny Boy Williamson’s “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl” and Bo Diddley’s “I’m A Man.” Both were stellar, featuring terrific guitar work, drumming, and wailing blues harp. It was a fitting end to a performance that had been good, loud, and rocking. While most of the players in The Yardbirds have changed over the years, the band’s hallmark of top-notch musicianship remains. There are no passengers in this band.

The Yardbirds’ current North American tour runs through November 22nd. Tour dates can be found on the band’s Web site at <http://www.theyardbirds.com/tour.html>.

The Yardbirds’ set list was as follows:

Drinking Muddy Water

Please Don’t Tell Me ‘Bout The News

I’m Not Talkin’

Heart Full of Soul

The Nazz Are Blue

Mister You’re A Better Man Than I

Ain't Got You

Little Games

Shapes of Things

New York City Blues

Back Where I Started (cover of song by Box of Frogs with Jim McCarty on lead vocal)

Over Under Sideways Down

Smokestack Lightning (cover of song by Howlin' Wolf)

Train Kept A-Rollin' (cover of song by Tiny Bradshaw featuring Jon Paris on second blues harp and co-lead vocal)

Still I'm Sad

Lost Women

For Your Love

Happenings Ten Years Time Ago

Dazed and Confused (cover of song by Jake Holmes)

Encore:

Good Morning Little Schoolgirl (cover of song by Sonny Boy Williamson)

I'm A Man (cover of song by Bo Diddley)