



CHANGES

Over the years the Yardbirds have had three master guitarists who went on to form their own groups—Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Jimmy Page. The lightning fingers of Clapton and Beck (and, of course, Jimi Hendrix) have defined the standards and style of blues-hard rock guitar. In "Led Zeppelin" (Atlantic SD 8216), Jimmy Page emerges as important a stylist—not so much in technique, but in concepts.

Page is not the whole group, though. John Bonham on drums and John Paul Jones on bass and organ (he played piano on the

Stones' "She's a Rainbow") are among the best there are. Vocalist Robert Plant has a forceful, inventive talent. Working together, they are happy listening because they are sincere. They don't come on, they just make music and have fun doing it. That infused joy communicates and starts you moving, in your mind or body or maybe both.

Led Zeppelin is a folk-blues group with a sound wandering between Jeff Beck and the Pentangle. Pleasantly dirty. They don't have the tight precision the Beck group does but they aren't just sloppy. They are loose in exchange for feeling. All the material on this record is blues but it is performed with such variety that you don't notice that.

Most rock-blues groups (the Cream, for example) jam technically, unemotionally, and always on the same plane. Led Zeppelin shakes that tediousness by concentrating on the emotional effect. They improvise as much with the mood, tension, and

setting of a piece as most groups do with technical variations. Each song is an entity of its own. This is perhaps why the Led Zeppelin have such a distinct outline. Their songs have identities, they are not a means to an end, they are the end.

Page is much less frivolous with his embellishments than Clapton or Hendrix. He thinks in terms of the song as a whole and fashions his playing to enhance it, not the other way around. His technique is comparatively ordinary, playing off a straight blues scale with standard note sequences. It's the way he puts it together, like the phenomenal solo on "You Shook Me" (which Beck also recorded), that is so impressive. He makes long statements of notes, echoing himself like hitting upon a certain color and flashing it a few times to grind it in.

Plant resembles Jeff Beck's singer, Rod Stewart, but he doesn't have his vocal control. What he does have is raw emotional energy. Singing without

the studied bluesy runs or any other genre techniques, he uses the resulting freedom to explore. His style is more conversational than anything else and he does outrageous things like yodeling, pulling out words like a rubber band and then snapping them, bending his throat round corners. Sometimes he just yells and may be too uncontrolled for many blues freaks.

This album was recorded almost all simultaneously rather than layered in separate tracks, so it sounds like a good live band. They can do things this way that they couldn't otherwise, like lots of interplay between the instruments. Plant pretends his voice is a guitar and Page pretends his guitar is a voice. Then they mimic and answer each other, screaming like jackdaws.

Jimmy Page also produced this album, with as much skill as he played on it. There are imaginative uses of the instruments, like the pipe organ toccata that begins side two and a good merging of

flamenco and rock. Page has planted his flag in the world of eminent musicians.

STILL THE CAPTAIN of the Byrds, Roger McGuinn has gathered a new group of musicians under his wing and the result is "Dr. Byrds and Mr. Hyde" (Columbia CS 9755). It is smooth and strong like a blended whiskey. Part is kin to "Sweetheart of the Rodeo," part the acid offspring of "Notorious Byrd Brothers."

The country tunes are tasteful sugar pops: standard country arrangements with rock overdubs for energy. Especially imbued with that liquid-hoke that makes you want to laugh and cry at the same time are "Your Gentle Way of Lovin' Me" and "Drug Store Truck Drivin' Man," a mocking lament on the Ku Klux Klan country deejay. There is also the usual quota of space songs (one from the movie, "Candy"), UFO noises, and other electronic apparitions. An atom bomb goes off at the end of "This Wheel's On

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Fire."

Clarence White, John York, and Gene Parsons (no relation to Gram) are the new members and they are competent enough instrumentalists to fly in the tradition. But they are not the songwriters that Chris Hillman, Dave Crosby, and Gene Clark were. All the memorable songs were written by those three in

collaboration with each other and with McGuinn. In content, "Dr. Byrds" sorely misses its molted members. There aren't any songs with the grow-along-with-me magic that moved you on every other Byrds album.

I read a lengthy interview with McGuinn recently in which the entire conversation centered on machines and his mechanical toys: a robot you command with your voice, new ways to hook up special speakers, nuts and bolts. There is also a preoccupation with gadgetry and gimmicks on this

new album. I can't help thinking that if Roger McGuinn got along better with people, he'd have a better band.

CREAM FANS will certainly cream over their farewell album (Atco SD 7001), which is a glittering silver birthday cake "Goodbye." Outside the celebrated trio pose in a shiny vaudeville "that's all folks" complete with hats and canes, echoed by an enclosed poster. They certainly have made the most of breaking up.

Inside are three new songs and

live performance cuts of three old ones. "I'm So Glad," "Politician," and "Sitting on Top of the World" are jammed on at great length with the instrumental brilliance only the Cream and a few others in rock have.

Ginger Baker's "What a Bringdown" is the new tune which seems to be getting the most airplay, but it really is a bringdown compared to "Badge," a refreshingly pop ditty by Clapton, or "Doin' That Scrapyard Thing," Jack Bruce-Pete Brown's Trafficky collaboration that has

the gleeful meter of a children's song.

Listening to this record, you can hear that the same egotism that made them break up was also what colored their music with a kind of competitive counterpoint. The Cream are highly skilled specialists. Polished and powerful, but each busy doing in-person grandstand catches. It is intricate, also a little frantic. They sound old and look old here. And wearily, they've given us a great sign-off.

—Johanna Schier