



The Power of JEFF BECK

The most common criticism I've heard about our "Truth" album is that it's poorly recorded. Compared to some albums, I have in my personal collection it is poorly recorded but it stands up fine next to most of the current records in the pop category.

Also, I've never heard a real good drum sound on English recordings. It must have something to do with the impedance of our mikes and our voltage. The Tamla-Motown drum sound is incredible. It gives the whole record a lift but usually drums are just pushed into the background.

We spent four days of six-hour sessions to do "Truth," so considering that it's quite good. Particularly, since it was our first album.

Before the Yardbirds, when I was sweeping roads and delivering milk, I played guitar in little bands here and there at night and learned my blues style. A small blues following developed in England but compared to America it's nothing. It's very depressing.

When I first started, Bo Diddley was my idol. He used to defy all the laws of music. He'd tune his guitar to one chord and just bash away. But he could do so much with that one chord. He was a revelation to me, but now I've gotten past that point of view and improved, I hope.

If you ask a classical guitarist about Diddley, he'll say he's terrible. The motive Diddley had was right. He created new sounds when he experimented with that echo and vibrato. Diddley and Chuck Berry were the biggest rhythm and blues artists in England, yet they weren't really R&B. I listened to them more than anybody and lifted ideas. My own song "Jeff's Boogie" is close to a Chuck Berry song but none of the phrases are the same.

I learned guitar by playing along with records. Even before Berry, I listened to Les Paul. The songs he played were very square but his playing was extremely hip. I tried to follow his runs and phrases for hours, just parroting them and no one wanted to know me because

you can't play Les Paul runs in rock and roll.

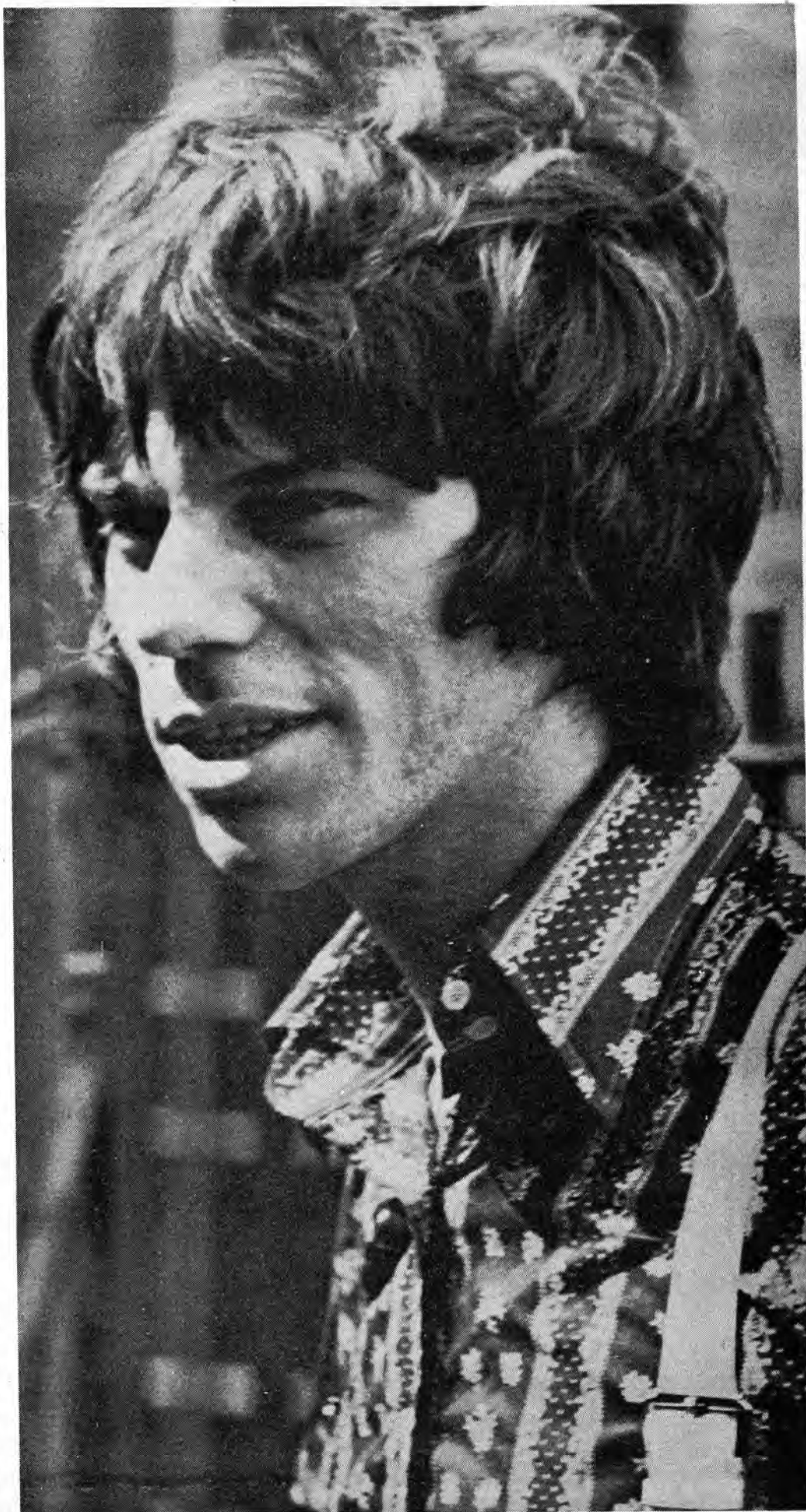
When I played with my first group, I had a terrible home-made amplifier. If I turned it up to get more volume, it would squeak and make hideous noises. It was a monster which I rewired and nailed together. People would come round and say how great it sounded but it was just awful. But that's when I discovered distortion and feed back so I bought a better amplifier and refined the weird noises. It was an under-power amp with a too-powerful guitar and it fed back automatically. I could sustain notes with that too once they hit a certain register. Then some brilliant mind invented a fuzz box which is a tiny amplifier that boosts the guitar signal before it goes into the big amplifier and it produces a true, clean long note. Now people use that to simulate, violins or horns.

The Yardbirds was my first experience with the big time. It was quite glamorous and I enjoyed the early part. Looking back now it's just a joke but it was a lot of fun. We fought towards the end over the music and if we did a bad show, we'd all be blaming each other. That's what happened to Cream.

Jimmy Page and myself were getting into some interesting double lead things with the Yardbirds but, I left and it never materialized. I wanted credit for what I was doing in the Yardbirds so it would encourage me to do more. But I was sweating for nothing and I left in a fury. I didn't have any say at all. I didn't even touch the guitar for five months after I left. But I started to miss making music, so I decided to form my own group.

But for those five months I sat around, spent my money and did absolutely nothing. Nothing could inspire me. I went around at night listening to all kinds of bands and I thought, "God, if that's what people are digging, then I'm not going to bother." Then one night, just by chance, I caught Jimi Hendrix before he was famous and that did it. I wanted to get back on the scene.

I started to look around for guys that would fit my kind of music. I wanted a hoarse singer that would fit my guitar playing and a bass player and drummer that would groove with us. I hate auditioning musicians, so I went out watching bands to find the guys I wanted. I listened to bass players and drummers to see how they got into their thing. I judged them by how they could fit into my guitar playing. I caught Rod Stewart with another band and I dug him right away. He made me feel good, so I asked him if he could sing the way I wanted him to sing. He knew what I meant and he did it. I stole all the guys from other bands. Rod was in the





Brian Auger, Julie Driscoll group along with Long John Baldry. I got my drummer from that group too. I was careful to choose guys that would understand my music was the main thing. With that understanding, we all get along fine.

I've always wanted a piano player in the group but it's hard to find clubs and auditoriums that have a good piano. Recently I hired a piano player and we travel with a portable electric piano. Now we can do a lot of stomping boogie numbers.

Now some of my favorite guitar players are George Benson, Jose Feliciano and the guy with Blood, Sweat and Tears. There's a lot more, too.

I like Blood, Sweat and Tears, but I don't think I'd like to use horns in my band unless they became very popular. Now, my mind doesn't think in terms of brass sounds. I'm not musically educated enough to use horns yet. I do the arranging for the band now, but it's kept simple.

I'm hopeless as a writer but I've got an ear for taking other songs and re-arranging them. I love taking old songs and re-dressing them. That's why we did "Old Man River," "Morning Dew" and "Greensleeves" on the first album. No one else in the band is a writer either. There have been some attempts at writing within the band but it's a sorry lot. We just re-work blues numbers for our main music. The next album will

have six new songs of our own. Rod and myself have worked out things with voice and guitar and we worked the music around that. We had a hard time writing lyrics, but it's the best we can do. The other side of the album will have six old songs re-worked and we'll see which material gets the biggest response. The instrumentation will be the same, but the piano player will have more to do. He won't play any organ. I don't like organ. I can't help but think of organ music as accompaniment for an old ladies function. Piano is much better for me. Our drummer loves African music and we'll be getting into that on the new album too.

I know country-western music is having quite an affect on a lot of bands but it's not getting to me. It's my nature, at the moment, to play hard. I'm very tense and when I play hard it relaxes me. I expect, though, as I get older I'll become more harmless.

We're pretty loud but not as loud as Blue Cheer, or Hendrix. I'm not going to play loud for much longer though because I feel myself getting into a softer thing. I can use dynamics a lot more in a medium volume range. Loudness is a great wear on the listeners and the players.

I use two one-hundred-watt Marshall amplifiers and the bass player uses two two hundred-watt Marshalls. Bass needs wattage in that low register to push it

out. The treble of my guitar is piercing so I can use lower wattage. My guitar is one of the old Les Paul Gibsons. I've had it for a long time. Nothing is customized. I use all stock factory stuff. I rarely use a wah wah pedal or a fuzz tone. I'll use the fuzz if we're playing in a small place because it fills up. In a large hall, I can get a fuzz sound by just turning the amps full up.

I still have a very strong feeling for blues. I play that best of anything else, I think, and I'll play it as long as there's a demand for it. It gives me a great deal of pleasure. I enjoy all kinds of music though because it can make me feel many different things. I'm thinking a lot about moving into other types of music now but I don't know what. I just feel a softer thing coming over me.

It was a real hassle, and it still is, finding places to practice. We find old dark cellars and the back room of a pub occasionally but we get thrown out after we've tuned up and never get the chance to jam. It's impossible to practice in London. There's no place to go. Once we found a big empty theatre and we could play as loud as we wanted, but it closed down. Hendrix is beautiful to jam with. He'll play anything you want him to. It's easier to jam in New York. Sometimes I enjoy a good jam but after hours I'd rather go home and get out of it altogether. □ jeff & jim