



*By Chip Lovitt, GJD Contributor*

I was a Jeff Beck fan even before I knew who Jeff Beck was.

Back in 1965 I was a rock-crazed 12-year-old with a cheapo electric guitar and Fender Princeton Reverb amp, and a voracious appetite for 45-rpm single records, especially ones by bands of the post-Beatles British Invasion.

I'd been hooked, line and sinker, by the Yardbirds' first smash hit, "For Your Love." When "Heart Full of Soul" came out in the summer of '65, I was mesmerized by the stinging, fuzzed-up guitar intro and solo. But since I didn't have the Yardbirds' albums, I didn't know who played them. Months later, I heard another Yardbirds' hit, "Shapes of Things," and was knocked out by its reverb-drenched chords and the wailing guitar solo. But I still didn't have a clue who was creating these powerful new guitar sounds. Then in May 1966, I found out when I bought the Yardbirds' next smash hit, "Over, Under, Sideways, Down." The song featured this fiery, psychedelic sitar-like sound that again, did not sound like any other guitarist I'd ever heard. Then I turned the single over, put the turntable needle down and out poured this racing, revved-up blues-boogie rave-up called "Jeff's Boogie." Who was this Jeff guy, I wondered.

I bought the album that featured the two songs, and learned that Jeff Beck, the guitarist who had replaced Eric Clapton in the Yardbirds in 1965, was responsible for all those sounds. From that moment on, I knew I would be a lifelong Jeff Beck fan.

In August 1968, I bought Beck's Truth album, and was stunned by "Beck's Bolero," an electric guitar tour-de-force featuring majestic power chords and a solo that soared into the stratosphere like a rocket. (It also didn't hurt that Jimmy Page played rhythm guitar and the Who's Keith Moon was on drums.) The rest of the album, which featured a young Rod Stewart on vocals was a revelation, too, full of heavy-duty blues-rock, like "You Shook Me," and a version of "Ain't Superstitious" that turned the Howling Wolf original on its head. Same for Beck's instrumental reading of the traditional tune, "Greensleeves."

Over the next few years, my record library swelled, as I added Beck-Ola, Rough & Ready, and the Jeff Beck Group, to the B-section of the collection. Then came the mid-70s releases, Blow by Blow and Wired, which were produced by Beatles producer, George Martin. Beck's takes on the Beatles' "She's a Woman," Steve Wonder's "Cause We've Ended as Lovers," and Charles Mingus' "Goodbye Porkpie Hat" confirmed my opinion that Jeff Beck was one of the most

talented and original guitarists in rock. The cuts were all instrumentals, but he sure could make his Strat sing...or scream, moan, and practically speak. To my ears, Jeff Beck was taking rock guitar into new and uncharted territory. It was often categorized as fusion for its mix of rock and jazz, but whatever it was called, it was like nothing I'd heard before.

At that moment, I became one of those fanatical Jeff Beck fans that bought everything he released and catch him in concert every time he toured.

Cut to 2009. I had just bought Beck's CD, *Performing this Week: Live at Ronnie Scott's*—a powerful and career-spanning set recorded at the legendary London jazz club—when I learned tickets were about to go on sale for two shows at New York's The Fillmore at Irving Plaza. I just had to go. I got online the moment the tickets went on sale. But as seems to be happening more and more lately, there were no tickets available. I was completely shut out.

Luckily, my buddy Richard is far more persistent and savvy when it comes to getting those good last-minute tickets that mysteriously free up after the initial ticket sale. That's how I got to see and hear Jeff and his excellent band—Vinnie Colaiuta on drums, Jason Rebello on keys, and 23-year-old prodigy, Tal Wilkenfeld, on bass.

The room was standing room only and was packed shoulder to shoulder when Beck kicked off the show with the opening chords to "Beck's Bolero." For the next 90 minutes, Beck showed the complete mastery of the electric guitar he's famous for. With just a Strat, whammy bar, a modest arsenal of effects, a Marshall stack, and his fingers (no pick), Beck coaxed an amazing spectrum of sounds out of his signature Strat.

Playing favorites like "Led Boots," and "Cause We've Ended as Lovers," Beck shifted between fired-up funk, screaming, scorching rapid-fire rock riffs and delicate and melodic lines full of beauty and emotion. Using sustain and vibrato, he bent, twisted, and stretched strings almost beyond their limits, and crafted lightning-fast lines that danced across the full length of the fretboard. At times, Beck's Strat was twangy and clean. Then he'd use distortion to make the guitar groan, squawk and quack like a two-ton duck being choked. In those moments, Beck's playful sense of humor was apparent, and he didn't have to say a word to do it. He can stop on a dime and change musical directions in a flash and take a song in a whole direction before you even notice he did it. And no one does whammy bar dive-bombs better than Jeff Beck.

Beck's technique is often staggering. He can wring out trembling, wavering tones that constantly explore the nuances of each note in microtonal increments. It's as if he can find a half a dozen subtle tones between single notes. His slide work does the same, and on "Angel" his Strat sounded like a chorus of birds singing as the notes flew into the air. He added wistful jazz touches to "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," then used dramatic volume swells and ringing runs of harmonics to segue into "Brush with the Blues." On "Scatterbrain" he unleashed a flurry of fusion-style riffs that raced, rocked and ripped like a twisted machine gun attack, while "Behind the Veil" featured choked chords with rubbery reggae rhythms.

Beck's band deserves mention, too. Jason Rebello's keyboards add a rich and varied backdrop for Beck's guitar, and his solos were as diverse and compelling as Beck's. Vinnie

Colaiuto's drumming was fast, fluid, and as powerful and steady as a jackhammer. Of particular note was the bass playing of 23-year-old whiz kid Tal Wilkenfeld. She not only could keep up note for note with Beck, on even his most complex lines, but did a call and response duel with her boss that had the crowd cheering with delight. At times, her instrument sounded like a thunderous rhythm guitar as she pounded out bass chords.

By the time, Beck closed the show with a hauntingly beautiful instrumental version of "A Day in the Life," many of us guitar freaks in the crowd were left shaking our heads in wonder, shock and awe. Jeff Beck's amazing range of sounds, styles, tones, and technique is truly out of this world and I'm convinced that he lives in a sonic solar system that no other guitar player can travel to.

A few days before the show, Jeff was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for his solo career. (He was inducted as a member of the Yardbirds, but this was for his solo career.)

All I can say is it's about time.