



Going Up? Mickey Jupp

In the blissful but poverty stricken days of College, the only way to widen your musical horizons was courtesy of John Peel and other people's collections. Both played a significant part in my discovery of Mick Jupp. A track on Top Gear led to a mention to a mate of mine who casually produced a copy of the Legend album and to my everlasting delight I managed to rescue a copy for myself a few weeks later from a bargain bin. I was hooked; eventually all three Legend albums became a part of my collection. The prospect of actually talking to Jupp has been something that's always been high on my list of priorities so when he hit the vicinity on the Costello tour ("He's not my cup of tea, we call him Albert.") I set up the interview straight away. Mick he's not fond of the Mickey tag) was in a talkative mood although his recollection of some details is a little unclear, dimmed by time and the fact that he's not over-concerned with his own part in the music industry.

Starting at the beginning necessitates roaming back to the early R&B drenched days of Southend in the early 60's. Pete Frame's Zig Zag family tree picks up on Jupp with the

Orioles, but before that he'd been in a band called the Black Diamonds for a year or so in which he played piano, as yet not called on to demonstrate his vocal prowess. His first real involvement in the music scene began in late 63 with the Orioles. "Tony Diamond (the drummer) was the singer, I was just the piano player. We all went down the Shades Club and Robbie Trower (then with the Paramounts) introduced me to Ada Baggerley (bass). We had a couple of rehearsals and started at the Shades on Wednesday, with the Paramounts playing Sundays. Dave Gilman (?) played guitar with us before Dougie Sheldrake joined us; that made all the difference. The Paramounts did their 'Poison Ivy' and left the club, so we took over their Sundays. In the meantime I started doing all the singing. At one rehearsal I started singing Barret Strong's 'Money' and Tony said I was the singer from then on. We were doing Chuck Berry material, R&B, rock and roll, nothing original because I hadn't thought of writing then."

From the reaction they got on the Sundays the word got round and the boss of the Cricketers Club took them on three nights a week, "on

Saturdays we'd play the Studio Club after the Cricketers." Their signature tune was 'Rockin' Robin' and according to Will Birch, "in the middle eight, where it goes 'up jumped the buzzard and the oriole', everyone would shout out 'ORIOLES!' However, things weren't going to smoothly for Jupp, he was broke, without a job and his marriage had split up. Nor was he too happy with the band. "Dougie liked things too much his own way and we'd had troubles with the drummer. One night he just didn't turn up. I knew Bobby Clouter and he stepped in and eventually I went round to see his lot rehearse, there was Mo Witham (guitar), Barry Scanling (guitar), John Bobin (bass) and a guy called Mark Mills. It was great so we joined up and kept the name of the Orioles. We carried on till March 66, when I got carted off for non payment of maintenance and got put inside for 6 weeks. After that the whole thing blew out, Bob and John joined the Fingers and when I got out of Brixton I got a job in a local shop for a year. A woman who'd worked as a barmaid at the Cricketers came in and said her son had a pub in Brentwood with a rock and roll outfit on Sunday lunchtimes, so I strolled over and it was 3 guys who used to be in

Rockerfellers, the Paramounts idols. I played with them for a while then a year later I moved to Bath for a year, it was then I really started to write. I still used to go back on the odd Sundays and one day this Dave Watson, a small time music publisher, walked in, expressed an interest in me and talked me into coming back from Bath. That's when I formed the band."

Before we get to Legend 1, a few dates can be filled in courtesy of ZZ's tree. Orioles 1 folded in 64, with Orioles 2 rolling through till late 65. Orioles 3 lasted for a few weeks in Autumn 65 which led to the final lineup, without Barry Scanling. The band never had anything released, although they did record a demo of 'Sweet Dreams/Baby Baby' (one of Jupp's tunes), but 'we didn't do anything with it.'

So the Legend mark 1, which lined up as Jupp, now playing guitar as well as piano, Chris East (guitar), Nigel Dunbar (drums) and Steve Geere (string bass). "We never did a gig - no, we did one once for a bunch of publishers who were having a binge on the Thames. That was the only thing we did except for the album." They got a deal with Bell through some skillful hustling on Watson's part, "somebody liked it, put it out and we got a lot of radio plays. We couldn't do any gigs, we weren't prepared for it. No equipment, no p.a., we looked wrong - still do to some extent. But I made quite a bit of money from radio plays." In Jupp's opinion the album sounded like it was recorded "in a barn last thing on a Saturday night, very light-weight." Still it was my first introduction to the band and contains one of my favourite Legend cuts, the light and breezy and totally inconsequential 'Heather on the Hill', a song that is in feel very close to Jupp's own drifting way of life. The album as a whole is very much a cross between almost poppy songs and boogie down R&B. It opens up with 'National Gas', another warm sound

that rolls along nicely picking up the listener as it curls out of the speakers, Jupp's rough edged vocals never sounding too abrasive. Nothing on the album sounds forced, nor does the 'electric age' intrude, take for example the acoustic dominated 'Tombstone', that chugs in fine form, Chris embellishing the final fade with simple but buzzing harmonies. Piano boogie is a strong influence throughout the album probably best spotlighted on the bluesy 'Come Back Baby', (recorded as it happened) 'City' is another pop song and like much of the material on the album is at fault because of the inconclusive fade, making it sound as though producer Sandy Robertson had little idea of what to do with the songs and chose to just let them drift away. 'Twenty Carat Rocker' and 'Shindig' show Jupp's rock and roll influences quite brightly, while 'Bartender Blues' lets the title speak for itself. It's not a great album musically, basic and simplistic but it does sound like a good time was going down and that's a lot of what Jupp's about. A couple of the tracks earned cover versions, the Symbols picking up 'National Gas' while Conroy Cannon chose to go with 'Good Boy'. Neither had a great deal of impact. If you come across a copy of the album you can consider yourself mighty fortunate. It's easy enough to spot in the racks by the front cover, a colour negative of a girl on a beach with some unidentified lump in front of her, "I think it's supposed to be a towel, but it looks like a gigantic turd. It was done in America."

With the over whelming lack of public interest in the album Legend 1 split, Jupp going back to Bath for a couple of months. "Robbie Trower rang me up and said to come up, that David Knights was just leaving Procol Harum and wanted to get into management. We discussed one or two things and got Legend 2 together. We persuaded Mo, John Bobin, and Bill

Fifield from the Epics to join us and played our first gig in April 69 at the roller skating rink"

Jupp's a little vague about a single called 'Georgie George' (Part One) by 'July' which Bell put out in October 69, but thought that it may have been cut with Legend 2. According to the trackings on the Stiff compilation album it featured Gary Brooker Chris Copping and B J Thomas and was produced by Robin Trower, which raises one or two interesting speculations since Jupp had left Bell by this time and Legend 2 were already in operation! After Bell declined to pick up the option Vertigo came along and Dave Knights brought Tony Visconti down to see the band at the Revolution. He was impressed and produced their second album, now referred to as 'the red boot album'. "It took us quite a time, three hours here, ten hours there. The first one took nine hours altogether. On reflection Visconti was great, but I didn't seem to be able to get across to him. We also had troubles with Offord who engineered it, he had this new console he wanted to play with while we just wanted to do some basic simple stuff."

The basic simple stuff that Legend were involved in this time is certainly beefier than their first album, Jupp's voice is in fine form once more and the songs are more assured than the debut album. 'Cross Country' is a Jupp classic, with a shuffling beat persistent nagging riff constantly pushing the song along. It was one of the highlights of the Kursaals early sets and appears on their first album, but I'm afraid they can't hold a candle to Jupp's original. It's also interesting to speculate about the amount of influence Jupp had on the Kursaals own 'Pocket Money', because the chorus hook is very reminiscent of some early Jupp work. A collaboration between Birch and Jupp has never taken place, but as Mick says, "they do call me

the god-father of the Southend music scene in the local papers. Maybe I have influenced a lot of people." Track two is another of the songs that's been fairly widely played, 'Cheque Book' was a favourite of the Feelgoods and has resurfaced in Wreckless Eric's current repertoire. A heavy R&B number with a heavier edge to the shuffle this time, I think that it lacks a lot of bite on the album, but Jupp points out that the sound on the dry master was a lot better than what actually surfaced on the album. The two parts of 'Lorraine' that appear on the album are somewhat different to Jupp's other material, being slow bluesy ballad numbers, the tempo taken down from a jaunty flow to a low light smokey roll. "they overlap with three on the last album, I wrote them at the same time because I was looking after a grand piano for someone." 'Nothing Wrong With Me' is a straight boogie number, speeded up and turned into harsh electric it'd go well by Status Quo. 'Somebody To Love' is a song written deliberately in the Fats Domino mould, the band doo whaaing behind the main vocals and featuring a piano solo from Jupp as the man himself would have played it. 'Anything You Do' is a lovely sleezy love song, of the 'if you were an apple you'd be good, good eating' variety. Nice. 'My Typewriter' is the oddity of the album; basically a straight rocker but opens up with creaking and crashing, and eerie refined vocals just like Monster Mash. "I wrote that with Chris East, did him out of some royalties actually, but he's made his money from 'My Kinda Life' which he wrote for Cliff Richard. In the studio I just started singing it like that, it wasn't planned." A great novelty song, and still fine music. 'Five Years' is very much in the warm relaxed lazy style that Jupp can evoke so easily, sleepy blues of the type that the Beatles popularised on their early ballads. It's interesting to listen to 'Hole In My Pocket'

for the semi-spoken vocal lines, because one of the people that Jupp most reminds me of is Steve Gibbons who is similarly a master of the style.

The album cover is truly one of the most dreadful things to reach the racks, two red boots with flames licking from them. Birch has said that it was "seen by the cognoscenti as a corny symbol of his renunciation of rock and roll." Jupp laughs at this, "that's what I told Will. We looked at it and thought 'what the f- all this'. Everyone said it was horrible but as it happened it fitted because we were just dropping the rock n roll. I made it fit, but God knows what the photographer was about, he couldn't even get the boots the right way round."

The album came out in January 71 and not long after Bill Fifield quit the band to join T. Rex who had just put out Ride A White Swan, produced incidentally by Tony Visconti. "We used to take a piece of chalk round and write 'T. Rex Second Eleven Were Here' on dressing room walls. We got Bobby Clouter back again for about a year until he left because his wife didn't like him touring. Somewhere around this period comes another single, 'Life/Late Last Night' but since I can't find an actual date I'm going to mention it and the ensuing Italian tour before Moonshine and hope for the best that some sort of chronology appears. "We'd gone to Italy and had a disaster. 'Life' had been in their top 30 for 3 months and made number 12, it didn't mean a light over here but the Italians loved it. It was a big Tom Jones ballad thing, I loved it. Trower told us to put it out, 'great' he says maniac! We were due to go to Italy for a month, but the guy obviously thought we were a different sort of band and when he found out what we were he tried to get us to do some cheap gigs. We went to the record company, borrowed the fare and came home. After that things started to fall apart."

On to the final Legend album, Jupp's favourite, called Moonshine. Another obscure cover shows a guy in a giant bear's head being totally ignored among a crowd of people. The album suffered a similar fate, receiving virtually no airplay and no advertising save for one small ad the band put out themselves. The three songs that stem from the grand piano are absolute stunners - 'Another Guy', 'Mother Of My Child' and 'The Writer of Songs'. Coincidentally all three are strong emotional numbers and all have string arrangements by Matthew Fisher, the most evocative and moving is on 'Another Guy'. "Del Newman and his 20 musicians played the strings over the track and I was nearly in tears. Even Del came in and said it was a lovely song."

Jupp own preference lies with 'Writer', which has an interesting musical structure building up from a deceptive simple ballad intro to take on a rougher edge with the guitar screaming away and the piano and strings sweeping it over into the boogieing 'Local Folk Ol'. Like much of the up-tempo material on the Legend albums you can just visualise how well they must look on stage. 'Moonshine' itself is a rich, almost funky slice of R&B, Jupp's vocal more hewn at the edges than ever. Other musical changes could be noted, the simple approach of the previous two albums was in little evidence here, especially on tracks like 'Shine On My Shoes' with its heavy bass riffing, putting one in mind of some of the Stones sterling R&B reworks. Only 'At The Shop' recalls the light approach with it's paper and comb break and oer glass shuffle beat. 'Captain Cool' is a great track, easily twinned both musically and thematically with Gibbon's own 'Johnny Cool'. "I wrote that on the night. We called Bob Captain Cool because he reconed he was - still does to a certain extent."

Sadly the band fell apart with the zero reaction, although there's a single that followed on from Moonshine called 'Don't You Never/Someday' (a country song) which dates from the Visconti sessions and features Fifield instead of Clouter. It didn't help. "We dropped Vertigo, I dropped everything. Bob and John had left and we'd got in a new drummer Barney James and a bassist Phil Mitchell. We played down the Pheasantry one night in April 72 and we were terrible. Me and Mo looked at each other and we knew that was it. I ended working in the same music shop as Chris East in Southend for two years and while I'm working there, doing sod all, the bloody NME come down, Max Bell turns up to do a double page spread - where's the justice? It's like having a pile of 3's and no one plays."

Zig Zag makes mention of gigs at the Esplanade club, run by Birch and Paul Shuttleworth, these it seems were merely Legend reunion gigs. There's also the brief sortie with a band called Kilroy that included Kilroy, Birch, and some other local names, but all they did was to rehearse a few times. As Jupp points out, "I'm not really bothered whether I play in a group or not." However he was eventually persuaded to give things another go; "the Feelgoods were giving me some stick, so I rounded up nine people and that was the Mickey Jupp Band. We were shit hot. The band did several of my songs 'S.P.Y.', 'Cheque Book', 'Guitar Pickin' Slim', 'Pilot' - Pilot, that's the song everyone raves over. It's a great song but I've had to do it so many times I'm sick of it. The band lasted for eight months, five in the original line-up. We started from scratch and managed to get some gigs at the Roundhouse, the Hope and Anchor, and we went down a bomb. It was great but some of the band wanted everything at once, management, deals, and I wasn't ready for that. Our difference was the three singers we had, Bob Fish

(now with the Darts), Colin Maxwell and Pete the Hat (as well as Joy Sarney of 'Naughty, Naughty' fame). They were just doing doo-wops with some great choreography and visuals, but the other guys wanted them out and I didn't put my foot down. After that we were still a good band but I just felt that it wasn't my band any more, I couldn't even get to drive the car. It was becoming the Bobby Clouter band so I left. I was just about to go up North and get a job when Keith Reid turned up, said he liked my stuff and put me on a retainer with his publishing company, and I've been with him for the past 18 months. That's why I'm doing this tour, I don't really want to get up there and play. The song we finish off with, 'Old Rock and Roller' (an ace song that really lifts the roof, and could provide a smash for him) sums it up. "I went home one night, pissed off, too old (34) and out of touch. It goes down a bomb but it's true, 'I'm an old rock' and roller,

I'm too old to roll". I don't particularly like doing my own numbers, I'd rather do rock and roll, but you can't make a living out of that.

This tour just came together and we had a week's rehearsal (the band lines up with Mick Grabham, guitar; Ron Telemaque, drums; John Gordon, bass) but we've got to sort out what happens at the end. If I'm going to keep gigging I'm gonna do it my way."

What about the current state of play with Arista who released Jupp's first single for a long time, 'Nature's Radio' (a great pop song with more than a touch of the Wreckless one's Whole Wide World about the opening) backed with 'Down At The Doctors' an R&B number that seems set to appear on the Feelgoods new album.

"I haven't got a contract, I want to avoid that as much as possible. Arista heard a rough demo of 'Nature's Radio' and they'd signed up some band they wanted to do

the song, but when they heard the demo I'd done with Procol Harum backing they asked me to do it. We tried to do it with Chris Thomas who supposedly produced the Sex Pistols - (he indicates a wet wrist), useless. All he did was sit and read his paper. Eventually Pete Solley did it with us. I don't know who's on it, just session men (rather an understatement seeing as how it features, Tim Renwick, Mick Moody, Colin Gibson, Henry Spinetti and Jimmy Jewell). I didn't want drums on it, I wanted percussion - but to save argument. It didn't turn out how I wanted it. it's too clean."

The next single, if Arista pick it up, is likely to be 'Switchboard Susan', a number that gets a good reaction at the gigs, and I'm sure that Stiff wouldn't be too reluctant to put it out if Arista decided against it. Other than that what seems likely for Jupp?

"I'm not bothered. I write songs as a hobby. Some people make model aeroplanes. I'm not really that into music, I'd rather talk about football. I've always felt like this but this time I'm trying not to get too fed up with it and leave it again. I'm trying to stick with it."

I hope he does.

Mike Davies

Discography

Legend, Bell, SBLL 115
Georgia George (Part One)
July, Bell BL 1082
Legend, Vertigo 636 0019
Life/Late Last Night
(unknown serial number)
Vertigo
Moonshine, Vertigo
636 0063
Don't You Never/Someday,
Vertigo 605 9036
Nature's Radio/Down At
The Doctors, Arista 136
Mickey Jupp's Legend,
Stiff, Get 2

Thanx to Chris for introducing me to the music.
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