



Dr Feelgood on Canvey Island in 1975. From left: John Sparks, Lee Brilleaux, Wilko Johnson, The Big Figure.

Canvey was isolated. People thought it was the Wild West. One little road wound onto the island over a creek, and any boat had the right of way.



and environs including Canvey Island) must have looked like a most fruitful neck of the woods.

Dr Feelgood, Mickey Jupp, The Kursaal Flyers and Eddie & The Hot Rods all seemed to emerge within hours of each other to capture crucial column inches in the influential music press, swiftly followed by major record deals and sometimes, sell-out tours and hit records.

Was it something in the water, or was it Southend's close proximity to London? "So near," to quote Gerry Goffin, "yet so far away." Sure Herbie Goins & The Nighttimers would be on at the 'mingo most Fridays, and with the last train out of Fenchurch Street at 12.25am (halfway through Herbie's second set), hanging out until dawn became the norm.

For Southenders, London was accessible (handy for the Feelgoods' lightning raids on the pubs in 1973), yet remote enough to facilitate a detached view. It is perhaps also the reason why no decent shoe shops have ever flourished in this 'helluva town'. You had to go Up West.

My earliest recollection of rock'n'roll in Southend was in the late 1950s. Like any other British town, skiffle groups lurked in every schoolroom. Used ukelele banjos, katkits (minimalist drum sets that would later have found favour with Jonathan Richman) and colourful electric guitars in futuristic shapes were all tantalisingly displayed in the music and secondhand shop windows around the Tabza Arcade.

Skiffle begat beat and beat begat The Paramounts (and The Rockerfellas and The Whirlwinds and The Monotones). These guys had Fender and Ludwig. Their followers had Mini cars and scooters and everybody had the hire purchase agreements to prove it. The Barracudas, an early power trio, even had the first twin-necked guitars, carefully balanced on prominent tummies.

The Paramounts were the dog's bollocks. Gary Brooker, Robin Trower, Mick Brownlee (later replaced by Barrie Wilson) and Chris Copping (replaced by Diz Derrick). They even had a road manager. Looking back, it seems almost implausible that such young men, barely out of school, could perform esoteric rhythm and blues so convincingly.

The Paramounts' repertoire was hip and exclusive. Johnny B. Goode? Leave it out. Bobby Bland's Turn On Your Lovelight was about as corny as it got. This group, apparently name-checked by the Stones as "the best R&B group in England", built their sound and early following at The Shades, a pioneering modernist haunt on the seafront.

In the audience was the young Mick Jupp. His brother Dave had been my patrol leader in the 3rd Thorpe Bay Scout Troop. Furthermore, their father was the senior Scout Master and their mother the Cub Mistress.

a scouting family. Highlight at Scouts, post-wide game and British bulldog, was when Dave Jupp took the lid off the piano to perform his impressive Elvis medley. While these Jupps were maintaining order at the church hall, I imagine that the young Mick was home alone, preparing to be the white Chuck Berry.

By 1964, influenced and inspired by The Paramounts, Jupp had formed The Orioles – the first beat group I ever saw on licensed premises. With an acid mod following and a piano-heavy sound, covering The Coasters, Bobby Day and Gene Chandler amongst others, The Orioles packed 'em in. My own group of the time, the somewhat less rocking Tradewinds, (as seen on TV), once secured a support slot to The Orioles at The Cricketers pub, but we made little impression.

In 1965, The Orioles failed an audition at Decca Records. Nothing new there, but this rejection was a great mystery to their local fans. Perhaps it was their lack of original material or perhaps it was an early manifestation of Jupp's reluctance to grab a career opportunity by the balls. The Orioles disbanded and their leader was not seen at large again for some years.

Meanwhile, I was asked to play drums with The Orioles-influenced Flowerpots. This group went through frequent line-up changes, but one event I remember vividly was opening for The Who at Bishops Cleeve in October 1965. (Keith Moon borrowed and damaged parts of my drum kit). Our guitarist was Colin Pinecott (ex-The Pickwicks). When the p.a. system broke down that night, Colin stunned me by spinning around on his heel and pronouncing loudly, "a raving Bs Diddles in G!" It was as if he were ordering a large brandy. ■



The Essex delta today and (above) the stately pleasuredome of The Kursaal which can just be seen behind the big wheel on the fun-seeking Southend seaboard of the late '50s.

Colin spun on his heel yelling, "a raving Bo Diddley in G!" It was as if he were ordering a large brandy.

*** When Colin left The Flowerpots in 1966, his place was taken by John Wilkinson, formerly of The Roamers and The Heap. We commenced a residency at Southend's London Hotel playing shows co-promoted by Robin Trower, resting after The Paramounts' break-up. There were after hours blues sessions and Robin briefly formed a trio called Jam.

By the summer of 1967, Robin Trower had joined his ex-Paramounts colleagues Gary Brooker and Barrie Wilson in Procol Harum. John Wilkinson had set off for Newcastle University and, subsequently, India. There followed a quiet period, but in 1969, Mickey Jupp formed Legend whose debut LP was released on Bell Records.

A year later, with Mo Witham on guitar, Legend signed to Vertigo and recorded the classic Red Boot LP, produced by Tony

Visconti, on which Jupp's singing and songwriting are outstanding. Legend lost their drummer, Bill Fifield, to T. Rex, after he had played on the Hot Love session. He was replaced by drummer Bob Clouter (!), and an all ex-Orioles line-up recorded Legend's last LP, Moonshine.

It was during this period that Paul Shuttleworth, Graeme Douglas and myself formed a progressive group called Surly Bird. We answered an ad in Melody Maker and auditioned for a 'top London production company' run by the great Tony Hall. Tony's partner in this venture was the late Pete Meaden, former early manager of The Who. We passed Pete's audition ("can you lend me ninepence for a glass of cider?"), and then passed into even greater obscurity when we changed our name to Glory (for London dates only).

In 1971, Graeme quit (for non-musical reasons) and we searched for a new guitarist. On one hilarious occasion we persuaded the former Yes guitarist, Pete Banks, to travel to Southend to fill the vacancy. On entering our HQ, Pete was impressed by our giant Marshall stacks and he proceeded to impress us with his dazzling fretwork. Unfortunately, we had great trouble in keeping up with him and he declined to join.

Around Easter 1971, John Wilkinson returned from India. I went to visit him on Canvey Island and asked him to join us. After a quick practice, we played at a youth club with about six numbers, one of which, the instrumental Night Train, John could play in a combined rhythm/lead style; he sounded like two guitarists. He didn't stay though, adding that he was thinking of joining "a bunch of kids on the island". I imagined 12-year-olds.

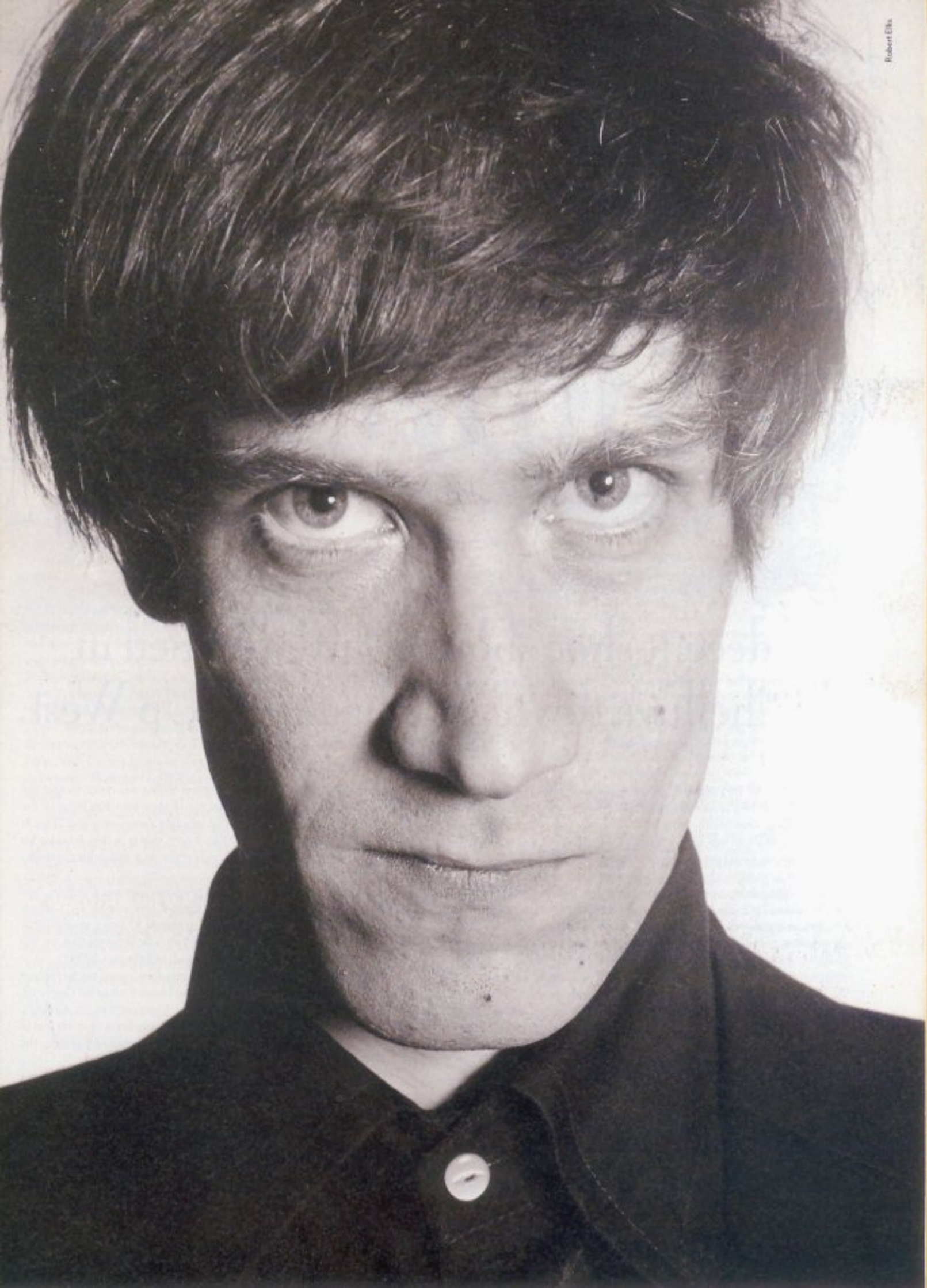
Surly Bird never really built a following. I recall that when we supported Yes at Southend Art College in 1970, the poster read, YES SURLY BIRD TANK. A particularly witty artist amended this to, YES! SURLY BIRD STANK.

Soon after this, Paul Shuttleworth and myself started putting on shows at The Esplanade pub (The Grand Canyon Club), often featuring Legend or Paul's country-rock group, Cow Pie, for whom I was now drumming. One night I received a phone call from John Wilkinson asking if his 'bunch of kids' could play at the club. They were calling themselves Dr Feelgood.

The Feelgoods played R&B in an era when R&B was bargepole time. One of their entourage was the late Ed Hollis, known to friends as '1,000 Eddie' because he then owned a staggering 1,000 LPs. To visit the Hollis pad would be to subject oneself to his shouting: "It's brilliant, it's brilliant," as he played brief snatches from his mighty collection, which ranged from Kraftwerk and Sun Ra to The Osmonds and The MC5. He loved it all and he became a great influence on the scene. I remember him one night at The Esplanade, after a couple of light ales, pointing in the air and exclaiming, "Let's form a sixties group!" ➤➤



Left and right: 'The Prince of Darkness', Wilko Johnson.





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By early 1973, Dr Feelgood had developed a dynamic live act, playing in the pubs and clubs around Southend. In London, a number of similarly rootsy groups were finding work on the fast-growing pub circuit. Often maligned, 'pub-rock' was, in fact, a revolution. After years of nowhere to play (unless you could get to support Blodwyn Pig at your local art college), there were suddenly dozens of new venues where groups could perform with the minimum of fuss and equipment. Entertainment was the key factor and Dr Feelgood were most entertaining.

By an amazing stroke of luck, I had a friend who had gone to work for an agency in London which was arranging bookings for two prominent pub rock venues. I pestered them for months on the Feelgoods' behalf but nothing was offered. Then, in the summer of 1973, a date materialised at the Tally Ho in Kentish Town. Dr Feelgood's London debut was inauspicious, but the promoter, Dai Davies, saw the potential.

Spotting the main chance, Dr Feelgood carried out some minor surgery. Front man Lee Brilleaux donned a narrow-lapelled jacket/slim-tie combination, while John Wilkinson cut off his shoulder length hair, leaving an extraordinary pudding-bowl do, and became Wilko Johnson.

Brilleaux and Johnson have always put over a slightly surly persona, often playing the dumb card in interviews. However, this highly intelligent double-act possessed an instinctive sense of drama and quick-wittedness

that gave the Feelgoods their onstage edge. Wilko was quick to spot the need for original material and on the eve of their first BBC session for Bob Harris, in October 1973, sat up all night composing She Does It Right. Sensing imminent fame, Wilko stated that it would soon be his intention to grab Mick Jupp by the scruff of the neck and deliver him into the spotlight.

Partly inspired by the Feelgoods' progress, Graeme Douglas, Paul Shuttleworth and myself formed The Kursaal Flyers, with Vic Collins, Richie Bull and Dave Hatfield. We drew up a list of 30 songs, mostly C&W standards, with a few pop songs such as I'm A Believer thrown in. We made our debut at Southend's Blue Boar pub in February 1974.

By May, my own desperation for beat stardom forced me to explore a position with Charlie & The Wide Boys, so I upped sticks for Cornwall. After a colourful week with the Wide Boys, I returned to the Kursaals, filled with new determination. Graeme and I wrote loads of songs and in July 1974, the Feelgoods reciprocated my earlier help by getting the Kursaals two dates at the Kensington pub in London.

We must have been quite good because things started to happen very quickly. At the first date we were spotted by Chilli Willi drummer Pete Thomas and he brought along his manager, Jake Riviera, the following week. We soon acquired an agent, Paul Conroy, who became our manager. In January 1975, we took the giant leap of 'turning professional' and by February we had a recording contract with Jonathan King's UK Records.

Back on Canvey, Eddie & The Hot Rods were about to emerge. Captained by Dave Higgs, who had played in The Fix with Lee Brilleaux some years earlier, the Hot Rods were a slightly younger group that spe-

(Above) The Kursaal Flyers, from left: Vic Collins, Paul Shuttleworth (wearing his 'CBS' suit - large checks), Richie Bull, your correspondent Will Birch, Graeme Douglas.

cialised in up-tempo renditions of '60s garage band classics. They were managed by the aforementioned Ed Hollis, from whose record collection much of their repertoire originated.

Fronted by the energetic Barrie Masters and the manic Lew Lewis on harmonica, the Hot Rods secured a date at London's Nashville Rooms in July 1975. They were an instant success and soon signed to Island Records. On a tour supporting the Kursaals in January 1976, Lew Lewis was sacked from the Hot Rods after 'redecorating' the group's dressing room at Brunel University.

The Hot Rods continued as a four-piece. At The Marquee in March 1976, they were supported by The Sex Pistols, a not uneventful crossing-of-paths. Perhaps provoked by their respective managers, the two groups clashed violently. Much equipment was damaged and a near-riot ensued. It was The Sex Pistols who grabbed the headlines during the following months in a race that they had to win, because up until that point, Eddie & The Hot Rods had been widely regarded as the leaders of a new youth uprising called punk.

Over the next 18 months, while punk seemed to overshadow all other forms of popular music, much happened in the Southend camp. On a £400 loan from Lee Brilleaux, Jake Riviera launched Stiff Records; Dr Feelgood's third LP, *Stupidity*, entered the UK album chart at Number 1; Wilko quit the group; The Kursaal Flyers finally got their hit single, *Little Does She Know*; Graeme quit the Kursaals, joined the Hot Rods and wrote their hit, *Do Anything You Wanna Do*; and The Kursaal Flyers disbanded.

In 1978, I formed The Records and we were asked to back Rachel Sweet on the 1978 Be Stiff tour. Stiff's gimmick was that the tour was to travel the UK by rail. On the bill was Stiff's most recent signing – Mickey Jupp. Both The Searchers and Nick Lowe were about to cover his song *Switchboard Susan* and his own album, *Japanese*, was getting the treatment. At 34, he was being offered another bite of the cherry. Jupp was, as you might say, on the up.

Halfway through the tour, on a train somewhere between Plymouth and Strathpeffer, and contemplating a rare day off, the entourage was instructed to "go home and get passports." Rumour and speculation ran through the carriages; excitement was in the air. It was soon confirmed that we were all about to visit New York to appear at the legendary Bottom Line. For Jupp, the bottom line was that he wasn't going, he put up a number of excuses, all brilliantly countered by Stiff boss, Dave Robinson.

Jupp: "You'll never get me up in one of those."
Robinson: "It's OK Mickey, you can go by boat."
Jupp: "But I won't be home for Christmas."
Robinson: "Well then we'll drop you from a big height."

Jupp had walked away once again. New York City – rejected; Stiff's flair and energy – rejected; another golden opportunity not given a chance. Nobody understood his genius, his pain; living proof that talent alone is not enough. Remarkably, Jupp went on to two more major labels and several independents, writing some great songs and singing his heart out. His songs have been covered by Rick Nelson, The Judds and many others. There's still hope, Mick. Now if you'll just pose for this sleeve photograph...

Will Birch's selected discography

The Paramounts/Whiter Shades Of R&B
Ediel EDCD 112

Legend/Legend (Red Boot)
Repertoire RR 4061-CX

Dr Feelgood/Down By The Jetty
Grand CD05

The Kursaal Flyers/In For A Spin
Line L1CD 9.00067

Eddie & The Hot Rods/The Best Of
Island 74321 14726

Paul Starkey



Andrew Lauder

A&R man who signed Dr Feelgood to United Artists

One day I got a call from Nick Lowe who said, 'There's this group, Dr Feelgood; you'd like them, even if nobody else does. So I went to see them supporting Brinsley Schwarz at the Cardiff Top Rank, must have been '74. There weren't many people there but it was really exciting. They played a lot of the stuff that was on the first album – *Roxette*, *She Does It Right*, *Route 66* – and their stage act was already well developed into what is now seen as the famous Feelgood style, with Wilko's manic runs and Lee's jacket.'

What was really strange was that here was a band who wore the same clothes on stage as they did off. After they'd finished playing they just blended back into the crowd. I was really excited because I knew so many of the songs. I kept on going back to see them. When I went back to the office I thought, 'Were they really that good? Would anyone buy this? Would it work?' When I told people I was signing a band that did early '60s stuff they assumed I meant something like Showaddywaddy.

The Feelgoods were so different to what else was going on at the time. The first album, *Down By The Jetty*, was made in mono and had a black-and-white sleeve. Vic Maile, who went on to do Matarhead, was the producer. He knew how to get a raw sound – we did it in 2-track – and it sounded tougher than doing lots of overdubs. We tried to capture the live sound, which was the logic behind the live album, *Stupidity*. The only real problem we had was trying to be as excited by it on record as when heard live."

Lee Brilleaux

Dr Feelgood singer/founder member

Southend was seedy, it was working class and lent itself to the blues image. You had all these pubs on the sea front holding live gigs. There was a great teddy boy tradition, a lot of the bands used to play teddy boy music. We weren't teds, nor did we dress like them, but we were doing a gig twice a week playing to them. In the '60s when everyone was listening to West Coast, we stayed true to our roots, collecting Mississippi blues records.

Will Birch saw the early Feelgoods and said, 'Do you realise there's a circuit in London where this sort of thing is happening? Bands are getting signed to record deals. We said, 'Don't be ridiculous, and admitted to a little fear of the big city. So we all piled into a car and saw this band, Ducks Deluxe. We thought, 'They're good, but so are we; we're as good as they are! So we pushed and hassled to get on the gig scene.'

We didn't change our music but Wilko and I started to pay attention to the image of the band. Wilko got the severe haircut and I got the jacket. I used to roll about on stage which was soaked in beer. The jacket got filthier and filthier and the more outrageous it got the more people liked it. The whole thing soon stopped being such a joke: we were doing four nights a week, pulling £200.

We played *Roxette*, which sounded like an old Coasters record, *Turtle Diving*. We eventually nicked the *Roxette* riff (as on the record) from a Lee Dorsey song. We were also doing R&B classics, Johnny Kidd & The Pirates, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, old blues stuff, John Lee Hooker. We were still livin' on Convey Island, lived there for 14 years.

The Feelgoods missed their opportunity in America. We'd had considerable success in Europe and our manager and lawyers went to America and negotiated with several companies, walking away with a superb deal from CBS. We were on their 'A' list for promotion with a big unlimited budget. Nothing was too much trouble. They flew us to the West Coast for the CBS convention, roadies, mates, you name it, we could have it.

In 1976 we were doing a tour of the South doing 10 major cities supporting Kiss of all people, playing 20,000-seater stadiums. The very first gig was in Mobile, Alabama. We had, er, a bit of hassle with their road crew: they said that no one was allowed backstage – Kiss couldn't be seen without make-up. Wilko threw a complete wobbler, refused to go on and stormed back to the hotel. We were sacked from the tour and returned to base, a house we'd rented in Laurel Canyon. Wilko sulked there for a week while Chris our manager went to New York and got a massive carpeting from the president of CBS."

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← Graeme Douglas

Kursaals/Hot Rods guitarist

/// The big bands never came to Southend because all we had were pubs. But there were always a lot of small bands floating around Southend. The Paramourts with Gary Brooker were the first big one, the first to get national recognition. Like in most towns, once you'd figured out you could buy an electric guitar and amplifier everyone wanted to have a go.

People were doing paper rounds to save up cash to buy a second-hand Futurama or a Hofner. A friend of ours, Peter Knock, who was a great Shadows' fan, suddenly managed to acquire a guitar. Everyone was extremely jealous. You'd give up seven dates with your girlfriend just to see an actual Fender Stratocaster!

By the late '60s I was in billions of groups playing in youth clubs. They'd form and fall apart in matters of weeks. Everybody started off playing Chuck Berry songs, they were quite easy to copy, then with Clapton and Hendrix everyone got more expansive and a bit cosmic and started being very precious.

In the '70s I was in the Kursaals. We always had the idea that you had to dress up. It was meant to be a show rather than just the music. The group's name was taken from a tacky amusement park in Southend, a fairground with a ballroom. Every year there was a carnival in Southend with a procession of floats of local trades' people and brass bands. There was a Kursaal float called The Kursaal Flyer which was like an old Wild West steam train.

When the Kursaals sacked me – my contribution wasn't valued any more – I joined the Rods (just after the Teenage Depression LP). The Rods weren't really punk, more Ramonesy than safety-pins-and-dye-your-hair-blond. The first gig I played with the Rods was at The Rainbow which was quite astonishing, standing on stage and seeing a bunch of kids ripping the seats apart was very exciting. We didn't make a penny from it, we had to pay for the seats.

Prior to writing Do Anything You Wanna Do I'd read an interview with Roger McGuinn where he was saying that the tuning and vibrations of his 12-string were never precise, which tended to make the guitar sound fat. I was intrigued by that and tried playing lots of overdubbed guitars with different chord inversions to see what would happen. The riff I stole from Born To Run."



Barrie Masters of the Hot Rods.

Wilko Johnson

Dr Feelgood founder member/
guitarist

/// I look back on that time fondly. We were the only people doing R&B – everybody else was doing Wishbone Ash or David Bowie stuff and they poured scorn on us. Mickey Jupp would do the occasional R&B gig but there wasn't a scene as such. There's always been a lot of bands in Southend and Carvey, but I assume it was the same at other towns.

When I was growing up Carvey was isolated. People thought it was the Wild West. There was one little road that wound onto the island. Where it crossed the creek there was a bridge which would slide open. Boats in the creek had the right of way. The bridge would open causing a mile-long traffic jam.

The Feelgoods encouraged other groups. Music papers and record companies started looking at the place and we were able to open up a few doors. We played locally, at The Esplanade on the sea front, which still does gigs. We played in 1972, it was 10p to get in and we got the door money. That was our regular gig. We also played at the British Legion and at the Cloud Nine disco.

A lot of the pub bands had musicians with reputations but we were new, nobody knew us. We'd been playing on Carvey and had got a style together. Looking at the kind of music that was going on it didn't surprise me that we were successful. R&B is particularly exciting; if you play it well enough people will always like it. But pub rock didn't feel like a movement, like punk. When we started selling records I thought it would lead to an R&B revival, but it didn't.

When the band first formed I said we've got to be like Johnny Kidd & The Pirates, so I started learning all the songs they did. They had a B-side called Dr Feelgood, an old R&B song, originally done by Willie Perriman on Piano Red. He changed his name to Dr Feelgood & The Interns – he wrote Mr Moonlight which is on Beatles For Sale. John Sparks suggested we used the name, but I said, We can't, it's been used. He said, Who's gonna know?

I wanted to play just like Mick Green but I never really achieved it. I'm better known than him, but that's just the way of this stupid world."

Mickey Jupp

Singer, songwriter, Southend figurehead

/// Southend was that close to London yet that far away. Even though journalists group Southend and Carvey together, they're not that close. In those days it took about an hour on the bus from Southend to Carvey – it was really cut off. In the mid-'60s, I formed Legend. We did an acoustic album for Bell Records which took nine hours to make. A lot of people, including Nick Lowe, said that if we'd have hung on for another seven or eight months or so we'd have been in the forefront of the pub rock scene. But we missed it.

I got back into making records thanks to Lee Brilleaux, who came into Chris Stevens's music shop where I was working one day in about '74 and said, You want to get yourself a band together, your name's getting a bit of a buzz, the Feelgoods and Kursaals are covering your songs. So I formed The Mickey Jupp Band doing r'n'r standards. We did a few gigs, got some great reviews, but there were too many egos in the band and we fell apart.

In 1978 I was on the Stiff Rail Tour but I felt a bit out of it. I was 34. Apart from the bloke driving the engine I was the oldest one there; everybody else was about 24. When it was announced that they were going off to New York, I said, Bugger that, I'm not going.

People say I missed my chance, that it all went wrong, but I don't think it did. I'm writing songs and doing the odd gig now and again and I'm quite happy. I live in Eskdale in the Lake District, and from my back garden I can see mountains and cows grazing in the field."

Interviews by Ed Glinert



Mickey Jupp:
"Bugger that, I'm not going."