VARIOUS RELATED STUFF –

1972 Fillmore – Clip from the movie with Bill Graham & MB 441

*****

1981 June 10 – Neil Young with The Danny Shea Band - Live at The Ritz NY –

Mike Bloomfield Tribute. Neil Young's only spoken "tribute" is: "Now, here's one for Mike" and then they play: "Baby What You Want Me To Do". Danny Shea (?) takes over the vocals and opens with: "We like to do this one as a special tribute to Michael Bloomfield, our dear friend, who some of us would be on the road with tonight, have mercy" and they play: "Things I Used To Do" - "Sweet Little Rock'n'Roller". 455

*****

1983 The MARINE VIDEO ARCHIVE
A TV-special about Michael Bloomfield with interviews with Nick Gravenites, Bill Graham and many more. Clips with MB.

1983 VIDEO – "MARINE VIDEO ARCHIVE - MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD 1943 - 1981" 440

*****

1986 Red Rooster Lounge Radio Show – Dedicated to Michael Bloomfield 395
Red Rooster intro – WDIA – Mr. Johnson and Mr. Dunn – Thrift Shop Rag – At the Cross – Orphan's blues – Women Lovin' Each Other – Big C Blues – Winter Moon – Rooster intro – Let Them Talk – The Altar Song – Snowblind – Red Rooster intro – Knockin' Myself Out – Bloomfield interview (0.23) – Red Rooster outtro – everything from records.

*****

1988 Feb. 11: Mark Naftalin's The Blues Power Hour on radio KFOG:
The Blues Spotlight on Michael Bloomfield
Introduction by Mark Naftalin - Born In Chicago - Blues With A Feeling - Got A Mind To Give Up Living - Wine - Next Time You See Me - Credits by Mark Naftalin 396

*****

1990 David Shorey: Rambova Records 7" EP 1990:
The Gods Love The Blues (Kabar's Tune) – Ambassador Blues – Confidentially Yours – Mojave Miles
"Dedicated to the Memory of friend and guitarist Mike Bloomfield"

*****

1991 Blues Deluxe video.
Has a silent clip with Butterfield Blues Band (without MB). A piano player surrounded by amongst others Paul Butterfield, Buddy Miles, Al Kooper is not Bloomfield, according to the highest authorities, even if he looks like and plays piano like him.

*****

2001 Sept. 23 – San Francisco Blues Fest. 454
Robben Ford & Ford Blues Band playing their Tribute to Paul Butterfield for the first time live.

*****

2002 Dec. 14 – Blues from the Red Rooster Lounge. 451
Presented by Cory Wolfson. Ford Blues Band from "In Memory of MB": "The Ones I Love Is Gone" (written by MB) and one unreleased track from Fillmore West – February 6, 1969: "My Heart Beats Like A Hammer" with MB on vocals.

*****

2002 Dec. 16 – 93 XRT Chicago's Finest Rock. 448
Blues Breakers - Halfway Highlight: Paul Butterfield the day before his 60th anniversary of birth.
Hosted by Tom Marker. "Our Love Is Drifting" – "Work Song" – "In My Own Dream"

*****

2003 Feb. 1 - Blues Edition WCDB Public Radio –
Spotlight on the music of Mike Bloomfield and Paul Butterfield 422
Hosted by Greg Freerksen. College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL A two hour show with music from records.

*****

House of Blues Radio Hour w/Dan Aykroyd aka "Elwood Blues" 449
Mitch Woods (piano) at the House of Blues. Speaking of MB as one of his idols. Playing "Blues for Michael" with James Cotton which is on Woods' latest CD "Keeper of the Flame": "Blues For Michael" – "In The Palm Of My Hand" (MB)

*****

? – Buddy Miles reminiscing in song. "Electric Flag" and MB mentioned. From ? 449
"Still Rock'n'Roll The Blues"

*****

? – Country Joe plays a tribute to Michael Bloomfield. From? 449
"Blues For Michael"

*****

2003 May 30 – Chicago Blues Fest.
Roundtable discussion about Big Joe Williams (and a little on Mike Bloomfield and others). 458
Several persons are speaking.

*****

VARIOUS MAGAZINES, BOOKS AND CLIPPINGS with Michael Bloomfield related content:

Rolling Stone??
Meet the Howlin' Wolf – by Mike Bloomfield
Last page from an article from?

Meet the HOWLIN' WOLF

by Mike Bloomfield

LEAD GUITARIST, HUBERT SUMLIN

HOWLIN' WOLF

general technique. He later learned mouth harp from the original Sonny Boy Williamson.

By age 19, he remembers playing guitar with the now legendary Robert Johnson, and remembers the "Terraplane Blues" vividly. Joynson, as Wolf recalls it, was also nineteen at that time. Wolf himself was shortly signed by the Los Angeles company, RPM Records. His first side was "Ridin' In The Moonlight." His second, "How Many More Years," is still selling well.

Chess Records began hearing about an important new blues singer named Howlin' Wolf, tracked him to his lair, and signed him to a more favorable contract. This started him toward the present stage of his career, with several popular sellers on the market, a weekend stint at the Chicago Westside nitery, Silvio's, a Washington, D.C. appearance notched on his belt (an appearance made expressly on invitayion from the Secretary of State), and appearances at the Fifth Annual University of Chicago Festival and a European tour both slated. As a matter of fact, it was Wolf who made the pioneering appearance at "Old Miss." He beat both James Meredith and Muddy Waters to Oxford, Miss.

Actually, Chester Burnett was that rarest of all phenomenon, a blues singer who had "made it" before he came up North. He had several record hits on the market, and was making regular appearances on station KNEW. Several singers were copying his style, and one even took his name – after he left Memphis. Some of these, according to Wolf, took other names as well. Jelly Jaw Short sometimes called himself "Funny Paper Smith," he recalls, thus adding greatly to the historical confusion surrounding the Wolf.

Of his own recordings, Wolf lists the following as his personal favorites: "Smokestack And Lightnin'," "I'll Be Around", "How Long", "Goin' Back Home", "Goin' Slow Slow" and his greatest favorite of all (and one that strangely enough he has never recorded), "I Should Have Been Gone." His hits include "How Many More Years", "Moanin' At Midnight", "No Place To Go", "44 Blues" and "300 Pounds Of Joy."

In discussing the meaning of the blues, Wolf said, "If a man has his ups and downs and you start worrying, you've already got the blues. If you're broke, you've got the blues. When you don't have any money, those are the low-down blues. If the woman in your house don't treat you fair, when you hear those blues sounds, that's the first thing you think of – and then you may go out and get you some whiskey."

Howlin' Wolf lists his favorite blues singers as Charles Patton (Hook Up My Pony and Saddle My Black Mare"), Blind Lemon Jefferson ("Blues Come From Texas"), and B.B. King. But of King he made the qualification that "I like everything but that cryin' string. I don't like that – I'm gonna be straight."

It looks as if Howlin' Wolf has the artillery, both in his own arsenal and in that of his hand, to make the most of his new string of American and European bookings, his contract with Associated Booking, and the upsurge of interest in the blues that is apparent throughout the world.

The Wolf is finally coming into his own, but you can keep your traps in the barn. Just set up your turntable. □

*****

1964. Dec. 3 – Down Beat
Review of MB (The Group) playing Big John's by Pete Welding.

Rec. 3
DB 12-3-64 pp. 32-33

Mike Bloomfield

Big John's, Chicago

Personnel: Bloomfield, guitar, piano, vocals; Mike Johnson, guitar; Charlie Musselwhite, harmonica; Bryan Friedman, piano; Sid Warner or Bob Wolff, bass; Norman Mayell, drums.

Growing out of an accompaniment unit for blues veteran Big Joe Williams, who has since taken to the road, this group has rapidly evolved into one of the finest, fiercest-swinging rhythm-and-blues combinations in Chicago.

In the first few weeks after Williams left, the group suffered from time difficulties, much of which must be laid at the feet of its then drummer. With his replacement by Mayell, the addition of bassist Wolff (later replaced by Warner) and, more recently, pianist Friedman, the Bloomfield sextet has developed into a tight, cohesive unit that generates a powerful—if a bit thunderous and unsubtle at times—rhythm.

The group is built around the gifted leader-guitarist. Recently signed to a recording contract by Columbia, Bloomfield apparently has no limitations within the confines of blues guitar.

He offers fleet, supercharged modern r&b guitar pyrotechnics with the same ease with which he re-creates the insinuating, vigorous bottleneck style of Muddy Waters. The range of his playing is pretty much confined to postwar blues styles, and it must be admitted that he brings them off with drive, vigor, and consummate ease.

If Bloomfield has one drawback, it is that he plays too much, for he tends to turn each piece into a virtuosic display,

much so, in fact, that the virtuosity ds to cancel itself out through over-tement.

Bloomfield, alas, is not much of a singer, d most of his vocals seem more like t, toneless shouts than anything else. ut, at the volume this group normally ays, it doesn't make much difference. any event, the singer at least does not sort to the annoyingly painful attempts re-create Negroid vocal inflections that ar (for me, at any rate) the work of ch young white bluesniks as John Hamond Jr., Tony Glover, and John Koerner, mong others. Pianist Friedman offers an ccasional unforced blues shout to the roceedings as well.

Adding a fine blues dimension to the roup's work is the idiomatic harmonica laying of Musselwhite, a young Memphis lues fan who has learned much from the lues men of that city and Chicago and ho has developed a convincing and arthy approach to blues harp.

He and Bloomfield have worked out a umber of arrangements that voice the uitar and harmonica in unison, and these re quite effective. Musselwhite is easily he most relaxed player in the group.

As noted previously, the group's biggest roblem has been time. This has not yet een entirely licked, though progress is eing made. On two nights of review, a eek apart, the band was right on top of hings the first night, playing strongly and ith fire; a week later, however, the men st couldn't get together, the rhythm eemingly coming apart at the seams. On his latter evening, the group was together only a few times, with the bulk of s performances marred by rhythm playng that was like a tug-of-war.

Still, the potential of Bloomfield's group quite high, and when the rhythm nses and they catch fire, they play a lot f good, potent rhythm and blues.

—*Pete Welding*

*****

1965 March 25 – Down Beat
Review by Pete Welding of Paul Butterfield's Blues Band at Big John's in Chicago. MB was not there.

*****

1965 Clips from TV series "History of Rock – Part 3" taken from the movie FESTIVAL! 441
Filmed at Newport Folk Festival July 1965.

*****

1966 January 6 – Variety
Review of BBB playing a 50 min. set at Poor Richards, Chicago.

*****

1966 February 7 – Crawdaddy.
Review of Mellow Down Easy – Butterfield Blues Band single on Elektra 45016.

*****

1966 March 19 – Melody Maker.
Article "Shades of Blue – A band with a new tradition of blues" by Tracy Thomas. Paul Butterfield interview.

*****

1966. May – Hit Parader.

Article: “a Hullabaloo for the Blues – The Goldberg-Miller Band.” 2 pages.
MB is mentioned playing at Big John’s.

a Hullabaloo for the Blues

the Goldberg-Miller Blues Band

"You can smell a crazy, hard driving recklessness in the air," wrote Jim Delehant in his Tempo column recently. "The kids want to feel wilder when they dance and the soulful feeling you get in the guts seems more meaningful now."

If you want to blow your mind without blowing your cool dig a new lp by the Goldberg-Miller Blues Band on Epic. It's great for nervous frantic dancing or soulful listening. It's predominantly blues, and blues is the news.

When the Goldberg-Miller group (Barry Goldberg, Organist; Steve Miller, vocalist, lead guitarist and harmonica; Roy Ruby, bass guitarist and Maurice McKinney, drummer) left Chicago for a Hullabaloo appearance, a 4-week stand at the Pirate Booth Discotheque and a recording session in New York, we immediately grabbed them for an informal talk about their history, the current blues revival and other groovy things:

We feel that the blues could become commercially successful. We think it comes around in cycles. The blues is to start off with, the strongest in most deeply ingrained traditional music in the United States. There was the Presley period, which was strictly a blues re-birth and it's coming back now. Any group that can take the blues and do it with real feeling and really play the music, will always have an audience in this country. Especially, among the rhythm and blues audience that already exists.

We are trying to take amplified guitar city blues, like the stuff that influenced Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Little Richard, etc. Our feeling, without trying to do anything artificial to change it, is naturally an interpretation of these four young musicians to play it well and free enough and not have to worry about making these arrangements. We don't do anything the same twice.

For many years the most live blues tradition came out of Chicago. Very few people ever made it out of Chicago, although they have established names for themselves there.

Most of the blues influence now, is the city blues. More of the songs come from such prominent artists such as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Bobby Bland, B.B. King, etc.

In the beginning, we used to go down to Pepper's (a club in Chicago) and sit in. Pepper's, was Muddy Waters hold out for many years. We would sit in and he would allow us to come up and play. There began to gather a large group of kids, that would come down and do the same. As we all grew up, we formed groups of our own. Butterfield formed his group, taking two of the musicians out of Howlin' Wolf's band.

Mike Bloomfield (now with the Butterfield blues band) was one of the first performers to appear at Big John's (another Chicago club). Soon afterwards, its popularity rose. They began to use the blues there and formed a large enough crowd that the club became a money making business. After Bloomfield left, Butterfield came and stayed for over a year. Big John's has become a starting place for many top performers today. It has become a place where a good blues band could come in and play, make enough money and get good publicity and exposure.

The difference between what we do and what most English groups do is that the people in England come to this music from hearing our records and approached it at first like folk music. It still sounds that way a little. They've learned the parts. Whereas all of us have gotten our blues experience playing in blues...actually, making a living out of it...backing it out till 4:30 in the morning, with people drunk, falling over your amplifiers. That's when the blues sound begins to come out...when you're in a club where you can experiment, where you can play, be outrageously loud, playing one song for hours. This way, it doesn't sound like a piece that has been written out, it sounds like the blues.

The MGBB did the Mother Song on Hullabaloo surrounded by nine little old ladies in rock and rolling chairs. Afterwards everybody went to the Phone Booth discotheque and jumped up and down a lot.

For example, when the Stones did "The Little Red Rooster," they did it note for note, like Howlin' Wolf does it. With the exception that it's very clean and studio sounding...which is no good.

Something that intrigues us is why the blues influence had to travel across the pond to be recognized and then sold back to us in a different form. Whereas, we had the original thing here.

The kind of blues that we play comes in off an outgrowth of folk music. That's what English Rock n' Roll is; folk music set to electric guitar. Plus their own traditional English diddy type sound.

We think that people are beginning to wake up and that they are not going to be entertained by the spectacle anymore and are getting back to the musical aspect of it. For a while, it was just a show, whoever could put on the best show was usually the most successful. Now, the people are demanding more musical talent.

And the *Goldberg-Miller Blues Band is the group to give it to them.*

Barry Goldberg, nephew of Arthur J. Goldberg, United States Ambassador to the United Nations is the leader and organist of the band. Barry has performed with top entertainers such as Jerry Lee Lewis, Muddy Waters, Dale Hawkins, The Troubadors, etc. Most recently he played the Newport Folk Festival with Bob Dylan. Besides being an organist, he is a composer with over thirty published songs to his credit.

Steve Miller, son of one of the world's leading pathologists, has led his own blues-rock group since he started High School. With that group he has played many of the leading clubs in the Mid-West.

Maurice McKinney, showed promise as a professional baseball player, but the service interrupted his athletic career. An accomplished drummer, Maurice has performed with some of the outstanding blues groups in Chicago.

Roy Ruby, began his career as a classical guitarist, Roy has played concerts in New York and Los Angeles. As a folk artist, he has accompanied Barry McQuire, Travis and many other artists.□

BARRY GOLDBERG

ROY RUBY

STEVE MILLER

MAURICE MCKINNLEY

*****

1966 August –
Various reviews of BBB’s first album.

*****

1966 August?
Reviews of East-West album. Pop Spotlight & Record Mirror & ads: Mojo Navigator

*****

1966. Oct.-Nov. – Tour of England
Program for the Fame – Farlowe tour of England. 16 pages.

*****

1966. October 8 – Melody Maker.
“Butterfield’s set for RSG!”

*****

1966. October 22 – Melody Maker.
“Butterfield’s Blues Men Aim to Spread Their Gospel in Britain”.

*****

1966. November 12 – Melody Maker.
“Butterfield’s booked for British Clubs”.

*****

1966. November 14 – Disc.
“Can you tell Cream from Butterfield?” by Hugh Nolan.

*****

1966. - Melody Maker.

Marquee Club, London November 10, 90 Wardour St. w/Wynder K. Frog
Ad for this show at the Marquee. Melody Maker Nov. 5, 1966.
Ad for this show at the Marquee. Melody Maker Nov. 12, 1966.
A short review of this show was brought in the Melody Maker magazine.

butterfield blues band

The Butterfield Blues Band has appeared at clubs on Chicago's South Side and the fashionable Near North Side, at Los Angeles' famed The Trip and in New York at the Greenwich Village Cafe Au Go Go and the Village Gate. Appearances at the Newport Folk Festival and the Monterey Jazz Festival were widely acclaimed and the band's reputation as the most vital of the new r & b groups has spread throughout Britain and the Continent, including a Melody Maker poll designation as the "New Stars of 1965".

The group is now accorded major star status by folk audiences, jazz audiences and Pop fans alike. Though most of their material is still in the hard Blues category, these experiments have led to a new aspect of the band's work best displayed in the astounding 13-minute title track, East-West, on the band's newest LP.

With so many richly diverse talents, it is certain that the story of the Butterfield Blues Band will take many more fascinating and rewarding turns in the near future.

*****

1966. – Melody Maker.
Short interview with MB: “The sad Chicago blues scene”.

*****

1966. – Melody Maker.
Ad for East-West.

The BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND

came roaring out of Chicago 18 months ago with its first Elektra LP (EKL-294). To signal the notable event of its first appearance in Britain, Elektra has just released The Butterfield Blues Band's second stunning LP, "East-West" (EKL-315) which presents this hard-driving group at the top of its form. BBB

enthusiasts should note, too, the band's first single, "All These Blues" c/w "Never Say No" (EKSN-45007), two of the East-West tracks. Highlight of the new LP is the astounding 13-minute title track which shows The Butterfield Blues Band exploring fresh, exciting forms.

elektra

For catalogue send s.a.e. to Elektra Records (U.K.) Ltd., 2 Dean Street, W.1

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1966. November – Crawdaddy.
Review of East-West album by Jon Landau. 3 pages.
"Blues '66" Interviews Part 2. John Lee Hooker – Butterfield Blues Band. 8 pages.
Interviewer Paul Williams.

*****

1966 November 26 – review of Town Hall, NY concert.
Review from unknown news paper or magazine: "Butterfield & Blues Band an Impact Act".

*****

1966 December 1 – Beat Instrumental.
Article "Paul Butterfield" 1 page by C.P.

*****

1966 December 3 – Cash Box.
Full page advertisement for Dynovoice 266 "She Comes To Me" by The Chicago Loop.

*****

1967 January – Crawdaddy
Note about recording and releasing single "Come On In".

*****

1967. January – Hit Parader.
Article "Mike Bloomfield Puts Down Everything" 3 pages.

Hit Parader January 1967

MIKE BLOOMFIELD

(GUITARIST with PAUL BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND)

PUTS DOWN EVERYTHING

By now, many of you must have heard the Paul Butterfield Blues Band albums and marvelled over the guitar playing of Mike Bloomfield. Through Mike's incredible style, the world of pop music has become much more aware of blues in general and Mike's idol, B.B. King, in particular. Currently Mike is the most influential guitarist in pop music as evidenced by the hundreds of lead guitarists in minor bands learning from him. Mike is also in great demand as a session man. He has appeared on albums by Dylan, John Hammond, Peter, Paul and Mary and many others. Jim Delehant cornered Mike at the Cafe Au Go Go, the meeting place of musicians, and had a little chat with him. Here goes.

JD: What was your very first experience with music?

MIKE: It was hearing "South Pacific". Outside of children's records like "Little Orley" and "Bozo Under The Sea". My parents had absolutely no influence on me musically.

JD: What was your first experience with blues?

MIKE: With the guitar playing it was my cousin Charles. He started playing guitar when I was 13. I got a guitar because he had one. That's when I started playing guitar. I really can't tell you my first experience with blues because I was hearing it and didn't know what it was. Then, when I realized what it was, a whole new world of artists and entertainers from Chicago opened up to me. I was about 16 or 17. I had been hearing blues records since I was 13, and I really liked them. But, I didn't know what they were. I heard them on radio station WGES in Chicago. They had this D.J., Al Benson. It was an all-blues station. There were Chuck Berry songs I especially liked - "Deep Feeling" and "Wee Wee Hours". I never knew what set them apart from the other ones. It was the sonority of those blues notes. I could hear them in Gene Vincent guitar solos and Fats Domino songs. When I was 15, I started hearing guys like Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hooker. I bought albums by Blind Lemon Jefferson and Big Bill Broonzy and Jimmy Reed. But I still didn't really know who they were or what the blues were.

JD: When did you find out what it all was?

MIKE: I had a fairly rough idea about the musical form and I knew mostly colored people sang it. Then one summer when I was 17, we moved to Hyde Park. There were a lot of folkies around there. They were interested in blues from a musicalogical standpoint - artists, their records, guitar styles. That's when I started to learn about it as an idiom. By then, my rock and roll experiences had made me a fairly proficient guitarist in that area. I just liked that type of guitar playing, not knowing it was blues. Then I heard guys in person that played that way. I played with guys in hillbilly bars and colored bars. I started to sit in all the time. I couldn't really tell the difference between what I played and they played, but there was a difference. Then I became more and more interested in the music as a musical form, intellectually - artists, data, the history. But I didn't get to understand playing the blues correctly, the notes right, until I started working with Paul Butterfield's Blues Band. Well, no, I think I started to understand it when I had my own band a year before I joined Paul. I wasn't really into it on a full-time basis until Butterfield.

JD: Did you always play amplified?

MIKE: No. I started working clubs when I was 15 with rock bands. You see, the difference between a song like "oop Oop A Doo" and "Money", which every white rock and hillbilly band I knew did, and Muddy Waters songs is very slim. When I was 17, I went down and saw these cats like Muddy Waters, heard them and saw them. And I really learned. Blues is not just notes. It's a whole environmental thing with nuances of song, speech and the whole personality of the people involved. It makes me feel good to understand it. It's a personal thing. I have a personal attachment to the music. It's absolutely part of me. It's the music I understand best, with complete feeling and all the subtleties involved. It's just something I'm really into. My main influences in guitar playing are Lightnin' Hopkins, but for a long time I played a lot of folk guitar – Travis style, finger-picking and a lot of country blues. But my main influence today is B.B. King. He's my main influence in music. Enough can not be said about B.B. King. I consider him a major American artist. There's a book by Charles Keil called the Urban Blues, Chicago University Press. That book tells all the things I feel about blues that I just can't say.

JD: Remember when you said you wanted to play with Ray Charles?

MIKE: I still want to very much. Some of the guitar playing on his records is vile. But he's got a great guitar player now. I'm very content playing with Butterfield's band. Playing with Ray is like a pipe dream. It would just be an incredible thrill to play with him because he and his band are so good.

JD: Besides B.B. King, who are some of the other guitar players that have influenced you?

MIKE: The whole school of Chicago guitar players. Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, Freddy King, Albert King, Albert Collins, B.B. King, Elmore James, Hound Dog Taylor, Muddy Waters, Earl Hooker, Little Smokey Smothers, Big Smokey Smothers. The different accompanists - little-known cats that played behind Little Walter - guys like Luther Tucker, Fred Robinson, Louis Miles and some of the older Chicago guitar players like John Lee Granderson, and a lot of piano players because I played a lot of piano. Piano players showed me a lot of stuff. Sunnyland Slim, Cats personally helped me, like playing along with them. Some cats would really take time to help me. Sunnyland took me to his house a lot and really helped me. Other cats took time out – Big Joe Williams has been almost like a father to me. He's been very kind and taught me a lot of stuff. Just watching him, I learned how a cat lives junglely. It's a rough world, his world. But, he's a rough guy. And our own guitarist Elvin Bishop taught me a lot of stuff. About 4 years ago, Elvin taught me a whole lot about basic blues guitar. He got me started on playing stuff correctly.

JD: Did you play with Howlin' Wolf's band for a while?

MIKE: No. I sat in with him. I sat in with every band I could. I never played with any big name blues bands; Elvin did though. I mostly learned stuff from playing with my own bands.

JD: How did you get in with Bob Dylan?

MIKE: He called me on the phone. I met him once at the Bear in Chicago, in his earlier unamplified days. I wanted to go down there and show him what a lousy guitar

Way over there on the left, Paul Butterfield and Mike wail. Above, Mike tells Bob where it's at.

player he was. I was incensed by the liner notes on his first album which said he was a good guitar player. I found out he was really a nice guy. Then I saw him again in New York at a party and we played a little. Through the strength of those two meetings, he called me to make a record with him. There might have been something else, I don't know.

JD: Were you on his first amplified session?

MIKE: No, that was Bruce Langhorn, a very good guitar player. That was really folk rock - Dylan and a few sidemen. The session I played on was just a big rock and roll band.

JD: There seems to be a lot of blues bands cropping up now. Do you think it's about to happen in a big way?

MIKE: No. Because I don't think any of them are any good. None of them even approach playing blues correctly. There are all kinds of blues, Chicago blues, country blues, jump band blues, there's Joe Turner type, B.B. King, Ray Charles. I've heard certain English cats who are extremely talented - Jeff Beck of the Yardbirds, the kid from the Spencer Davis group, Steve Winwood - he's unbelievable. There's another kid, he's on that Elektra "What's Shakin'" album we're on, Eric Clapton. Over the years, I've heard certain white individuals that can really play blues well and a few good singers like the Righteous Brothers, who are a bit too affected for me. Most of these bands do good modern electric rock and roll music and lovely ballad things. But they don't play blues, for my money. It's not authentically right. It's good music, but it's a farcical attempt to play blues. You've got to live with it, really hear it, you've got to know what's happening in the world that created it. You've got to know the artists. It's a rough thing to learn because it's completely foreign to most cats' environment. For my money, nobody plays it but us.

JD: Do you like country western music?

MIKE: I love it. I played bluegrass for a long time. I'm not really into modern country western. I don't know it a lot. I was just interested in it for a while. I love steel guitars and dobros. I think I'd like to play steel sometime, but it's a whole new concept, the pedals and all that. I play a little dobro but not good enough to play anywhere.

JD: Did you ever play any Chess/Checker sessions?

{Continued on next page}

{Continued from last page}

MIKE: I did an overdub on a Chuck Berry song called "It Wasn't Me". I just hung around there a lot. I wasn't good enough to do session work when I was living in Chicago. Now I am. If I go back there, I'll see if I can get more session work. Chess has a whole stable of cats. They've got a hillbilly cat who plays pretty fair blues guitar and they've got Buddy Guy, a wonderful guitar player, but he's got personal hang-ups. It's a very tight clique-ish organization. It's very hard to get with Chess and I imagine it's the same way with Motown.

JD: Why are you interested in Motown?

MIKE: I'd like to play on their sessions. They don't have anybody down there who can play like I do. I'd like to go down there and say "Well, here's what I can do, maybe you can use it." It's really just the money that interests me and the clean arrangements. Motown music is musically perfect, but I find it bland. It's cultured soul. I really like the new Atlantic sound - Joe Tex, Percy Sledge, Otis Redding, and that new one "Laundromat Blues" by Albert King - great lyrics. I like jazz things a lot, too. My own style has sort of been going towards that.

JD: Why do you think "Barefootin'" got on the chart?

MIKE: That's on the chart? An old shuffle like that? I don't believe it. I have very little faith in the taste of white people. Maybe it's just because he sings "Barefootin'". It's a good record. How about "Get Out Of My Life, Woman" and "Hold On, I'm Coming"? It's getting more liberal. I'm sure Motown paved the way. Atlantic has really psyched out the Negro working class people and they're really catering to their taste. Listen to the lyrics of some of the Joe Tex records, they're really just simple and moving. "I've been beaten up and tossed around." Straight gospel arrangements behind them. Very moving. I like a lot of jazz guys, too. The ones that can blow real hard. Powerful musicians. Roland Kirk is one of the most incredible musicians I've ever seen in my life. You watch him and you're so filled with joy, you're seeing so much beauty and power pouring out of that guy, you just start laughing uncontrollably. Archie Shepp, too. As I play more music, my taste gets better. I've been hanging around with a lot of music critics that have been helping me with my musical taste. Some cats are just geniuses and some aren't. Those geniuses are really worth listening to. Guys like Thelonious Monk and Charlie Mingus, really geniuses with great ideas. They're humorous and intelligent people and their music is witty. If you hear it and understand it, you're really in for some pleasant intellectual developments. □

Mike tunes up with folk queen Joan Baez before a performance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival.

In the next issue, Mike tears into singers with ludicrous accents, bad music and (arf arf) reveals how he plays guitar.

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1967. February – Hit Parader.
Article “Mike Bloomfield Puts Down Everything Part II” 2 pages.

MIKE BLOOMFIELD

(GUITARIST with PAUL BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND)

PUTS DOWN EVERYTHING

PART II February 1967

Here we are back at the Cafe Au Go Go continuing the final half of our chat with Mike Bloomfield. Since last month, Mike and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band have entered the national best-selling charts with their latest album on Elektra "East-West". Mike also played guitar with some of his buddies, the Chicago Loop, on a new single, "(When She Wants Good Lovin') She Comes To Me". In early October, the Butterfield Band turned on the British with some shows in England. Now, let's roll the tape.

JD: What do you think of Bo Diddley?

MIKE: I don't like Bo Diddley. I think he fell upon a gimmick many years ago and he's milked it ever since. He has a Mississippi accent and he uses pretty pithy subjects - like mojos and all that.

JD: But I saw him play to a white audience and when he did his dirty dozens, the audience never even cracked a smile.

MIKE: No. They take it all too seriously. The white audience in this country doesn't know what's happening in music. They have no idea how to listen. In England they know intellectually what's happening and what the words mean. They're rapidly pro-Negro. And old guys can go over there that can't even play, and because they are archaic old Negroes, they'll be applauded like mad. There are cats like Big Joe Williams that have a lot of poop left in them. But there's cats that just don't. One cat, John Henry Barbee, an old authentic blues singer who died. I met him when they tried to revive him, but he was just too old and tore up to play. Peg Leg Howell, who was recorded on Testament, is another. It was like showing a movie of an old acrobat who now is a complete cripple, feebly trying to climb his parallel bars. That's a bad thing. But guys like B.B. King and Muddy Waters who are speaking to the people-there are so many things in their music that just completely pass by the kids. Most kids listen to their music because it has a beat or because they know it's Muddy Waters and it means something cloudy and obscure to them. Or they're folkies and they know it's blues. A few cats actually listen to blues and enjoy it with all the gusto they can. There's so much going on lyrically -- an afficione will appreciate things that another cat will miss. I'm using that Spanish word because it's the only one. You have to live it, it's got to be part of you.

JD: You once said the same thing about Indian music.

MIKE: Right, that's another thing. I don't know the scales, but if you hear it, you can understand emotionally what's happening in that world of nuance that's going on there. That's very important if you want to get away from just playing the drone. The long piece we do is not Indian by any means. It just conveys the feeling. To get emotional is the most important thing in all music. If you can't get emotions out of your audience, it doesn't mean a thing. Swinging will almost always do that. Many of the blues bands don't swing. Swinging is an archaic term. Sometimes we don't, but we're capable of hard swing.

JD: Is your single going to be a hard swinger?

MIKE: No. Our single and LP are in "drerd" so far.

JD: They're what?

MIKE: It's a Jewish word, it means they never got off the ground.

JD: Didn't Dylan write a song for the band?

MIKE: The song is on his album. The song is in "drerd" too. It's called "Pillbox Hat". It's a cute song, but nothing special. We're so weary of putting out straight blues. We get uptight in sessions. Our organist, Mark, and I are writing songs and they aren't blues at all. I guess they're folk rock. We're not writing songs for the group and it's a hang-up. We should have some good stuff, but our tastes are too high and we're all so different from each other.

JD: A little while ago you said the white blues bands aren't good enough, but don't you think they could be a commercial success?

MIKE: Sure, they might take over completely, but it will be so messed up and phoney that it won't even have a chance. It happened before and it'll happen again. It happened with guys like Elvis Presley who were talented and adapted blues in their own way. Even though he's very groovy, he ruined the original idiom. The Stones did it all over again with their ridiculous "Little Red Rooster". We're doing it in a way, too. 'Cause we're not the real thing, either. The Stones are groovy. They do good rock and roll, they do Chuck Berry songs well. But that cat can't sing. Listen to Chuck sing and then listen to Mick Jagger -- he just can't sing. I consider myself as good as most of the contemporary guitarists that I learned from. Paul Butterfield CUTS the guys he learned from. Little Walter and those cats. Paul cuts them. You gotta be THAT good to play this stuff. You've got to be as good as the cats that are playing. You can't be a pale imitation. There are things that Muddy Waters did that you just can't get to. I can't play them myself. In Chicago those people are professional musicians and they'll laugh at you. I'm sure Muddy says good things about the Stones because they do his songs. But you got to play just as good as the other cats. Then you know what's happening. Most of these British and American guys just listen to records and imitate them. When I say imitating, I mean ludicrous, accented, ridculous, bogus, uncle tom, tasteless, crude imitations of a really nice thing. Now they might get the notes right, but those ludicrous accents just embarrass me. I sang exactly like that for a long time and I still can't sing. If those words really mean something to you, you'll give them the right emphasis without copying somebody else. I wish I could say something good about all those cats. I'll tell you a good blues singer: Bob Dylan is a fairly good blues singer. On his new album, "Obviously 5 Believers" he does some nice singing.

JD: Do you think the Motown sound will kill blues?

MIKE: No. Because the people that are buying Motown records aren't the people that are buying blues records. The people that buy blues records - that is, records by B.B. King, who is the biggest name in this country (Ray Charles is not straight blues anymore and Muddy sells locally) - B.B. plays the South, New York, the West Coast. He has big crowds - working class people ranging in age from 20 to 60. They know who B.B. is, he's a legend. The people who listen to Motown records are kids. But, Motown is too sugar-flavored. You can dance to it, but those dancers aren't gonna buy B.B. King. Actually, I think it's good for the blues. Anything that gets Negro culture across to the white kids is good for the blues. It might water down the blues, but it will certainly help the income of a lot of artists that aren't doing too well now. Like their songs will be recorded, and although B.B. is happy where he is, he might get the recognition he deserves.

JD: Have you met any young colored musicians who want to work

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from last page)

in the tradition of B.B. King?

MIKE: I've met lots of guys in their 20's who play straight blues, but not teenagers. Maybe somewhere down south in Stonewall, Mississippi, maybe there's another young Muddy Waters listening to Jimmy Reed on the radio and picking it out. I think the music will always be there for people who dig it. It's not going to die out. Maybe as living conditions get better and the basic causes for the blues get destroyed, it might. But I don't think so. That music is going to move people always.

JD: How do you find Negroes react to your music?

MIKE: We've had very good reaction, because Negroes seem proud that we want to learn about their culture. Also, their standards are higher than ours. Shuck that will pass with white audiences, will be considered shuck by Negro audiences. I've had great experiences in cutting contests with other guitar players, sitting in with bands and freaking the house out - jams for hours. But we had a disastrous experience playing the "It Club" in L.A. It was just empty. That was the only disaster. But Paul Butterfield played for a whole year at an all-Negro club. He did very well at Sylvio's where Howlin' Wolf plays.

JD: Do you think the band will ever be interested in electronic music?

MIKE: I'm already into it. But the way-out stuff I don't know. I don't use echo chambers and fuzztones and machines and stuff. It's like learning to play a whole new instrument. You've got to learn how to play electricity. Maybe I will someday. It's too much right now. I'm still learning how to play music. Electric music is learning how to play the amplifiers too and the other equipment, like colors, strobe lights. It's all very groovy, good way to make money and blah, blah, but we can still play music for a while.

JD: Are you serious?

MIKE: It's the music of the future. It doesn't have to be degenerating. It's just too much work to do it now. I'd have to learn all new techniques.

JD: Who are some of the groups that you like?

MIKE: I could name good groups and bad groups. Groups that I like are: The Blues Project, The Fuggs, Mama's & Papa's, the Lovin' Spoonful, The Mothers, The MFQ, the Byrds, the Beatles, very, very much. I think they're geniuses. They're electric musicians of the highest sort, and I like Bobby Dylan, Bobby Goldsboro. Dylan's guitar player, Roby Robertson, is good, too. And that's about it in the pop scene. I could tell you more people I abhor, like Lesley Gore and Nancy Sinatra and all the people of their ilk. I'm amused by Herman. He's getting better though, much more bluesy as he gets older.

JD: What kind of equipment do you use?

MIKE: I use a Gibson Les Paul guitar. It's about a 1958 or 59 model. It's gold and it's got 2 pickups, a toggel switch, 4 controls. I use a Fender Twin Reverb amplifier, I put the volume on 10, the treble on 10, the middle on 5, no bass, and the reverb on 2. Lately at the Go Go I've been putting the volume on 5.

JD: Being from Chicago, do you like Nelson Algren's books and stories?

MIKE: That's one of my favorite writers in the whole world.

JD: Have you ever met him?

MIKE: No. I never have. I think he's a cat that would really understand the blues and enjoy it. James Agee is another cat who might have understood the blues.

JD: Living in Chicago, are you at all aware of the romance of that city?

MIKE: No. I'm completely unaware of it. I lived in the suburbs, from a fairly wealthy Jewish home. I'm unaware of Chicago. I like it. It's pretty slummy. I'm aware of a lot of the blues legends there. The famous passing of Sonny Boy Williamson No. 1. His fatal stabbing. I heard it from five different people who all swore they were with him the night he died. How they brought him home, propped him up in the door, rang the bell as his inert, bleeding body tumbled in. That world I'm very aware of. □

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1967. March – Hit Parader.
Article: Meet the Chicago Loop. 2 pages. It's mentioned that MB played on the first single.

Meet the CHICAGO LOOP

March 1967 HIT PARADER

"We were waiting for a club to open," said Judy, the petite blonde vocalist of the Chicago Loop. "But the opening was delayed so we just sat around in a basement rehearsing and getting discouraged. We decided to come to New York for a weekend."

They brought a demonstration tape with them -- six songs they'd recorded in someone's living room. They also had pictures of themselves and they wrote their own biography.

"We walked around for days, carrying a heavy tape recorder because we weren't sure everyone had a recorder in their office," said Bob. "We played the tape for anyone in the record business who would listen. Bob Crewe's office was one of the places we went."

The next thing that happened was a happy, free swinging groove....an instant 3 dimensional party in plastic....., an old Coasters' song done in 1966 style. It was ("When She Wants Good Lovin') She Comes To Me" by the Chicago Loop, one of the most fun records of the year.

The Chicago Loop are fun too. As they sat quietly in our office one afternoon we found it difficult to believe that these six nice people were the same ones who did all that shouting and laughing and stomping on the record. But they did. Except John Savanna, their lead guitarist. He just joined the group.

In-person, John shouts, laughs and jumps up and down as well as making groovy guitar sounds. But when the Chicago Loop recorded "She Comes To Me", they didn't have a lead guitarist. A friend of theirs, the incredible Mike Bloomfield, the king of the white Chicago blues guitarists, sat in and really wailed.

Getting the lyrics was a problem. The group remembered the song when it was done by the Coasters in 1958, but when the Loop went to Atlantic Records to get a copy of the original version, Atlantic didn't have one. So they wrote the words as best they could remember them.

The recording session was wild. Producer Al Kasha wanted a 3 dimensional sound. The party idea was planned, but at times it sounded like a real brawl going on in the background. Everybody screamed and yelled and Bob Crewe, who owns Dyna-Voice Records, broke 10 dozen glasses on the floor before the record was finally completed.

Above L. to R., Carmen Riale, Judy Novy, Jack Siamos. Below Barry Goldberg, John Savanna, Bob Slawson.

Although it may not be apparent from their first record, two of the Chicago Loop were in folk music a short time ago and the others are well versed in rhythm and blues or rock and roll.

Judy Novy, vocalist and "utility" percussionist, and Bob Slawson, who sings and plays rhythm guitar and harmonica, were once folk singers. Organist/pianist Barry Goldberg, drummer Jack Siamos and bass guitarist Carmen Riale are veterans of Chicago's thriving R&B scene. Lead guitarist John Savanna has been in dozens of rock bands in New York.

Everyone was out of work when they decided to join forces in Chicago. For, a while they called themselves Time and they came to New York and played at the Night Owl. But nothing happened for them, so they returned to Chicago. Their next trip to New York was more successful. That was when they met Bob Crewe.

Now let's meet the members of the Chicago Loop one-by-one.

JUDY

Judy Novy was born in Chicago on January 18, 1946. When she was very young her father played "old songs nobody's ever heard of" on the concertina while she and her older brother Len sang along. They continued singing in high school and at local charity shows and places.

As Len & Judy, they recorded an album, "Love Is Bittersweet", and sang folk music. Last April Len joined the U.S. Army. Judy went to Michigan State College but didn't like it because "there was no place to sing except for jug bands."

Judy met Bob Slawsen, who wasn't very happy about singing folk music, in a Chicago club. "What would you like to do?" she asked. "I want to form a rock group." Bob told her. "I'm thinking about doing the same thing." Judy replied. So they did. Together.

One thing we must add: Judy is very pretty and very charming.

BOB

Bob Slawsen, born in Cincinnati, Ohio on November 14, 1945, grew up listening to a Nashville, Tennessee rhythm and blues radio station, WLAC. "I bought all the Little Richard records by mail from Randy's Record Shop" he recalls.

Bob got into folk music and had his own group, the New Almanac Singers. He went to college in Indiana and he appeared as a solo artist at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival.

Right after that he went on 3 months and 27 days active duty with the Army Reserve. When he came out, Bob met Malcamb Hale, formerly with the New Wine Singers, and together they played folk music in Canada, California, the South and at Mother Blues in Chicago.

"We were offered a State Department tour of the Far East, including Viet Nam," Bob told us, "It would have been a groovy personal experience but I couldn't see it furthering my career very much. And anyway, I wanted to get into rock."

Then he met Judy.

CARMEN

Carmen Riale was born on July 22, 1945 in Greenwich, Connecticut. He started playing the bass when he was 13. He joined Robby & The Troubadors and played many clubs across the country, including the Thunderbird in Las Vegas.

"We were doing rhythm and blues before most white groups picked it up," said Carmen. "Maybe that's why we didn't get a break. We were too early."

Robby & The Troubadors split up. Carmen stayed in Chicago where he met Mike Bloomfield and Barry Goldberg and lots of other people who liked to play rhythm and blues. He met Judy and Bob and things started happening.

BARRY

Barry Goldberg, born in Chicago 23 years ago, remembers, "when I was ten years old I found a funny station on the radio. It didn't come in very good, but it played different music. One of the programs was called Jam with Sam. I found out it was blues, rhythm and blues and gospel. That was what I really dug."

Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard were big influences on young Barry when he formed his own band in high school. His first professional job was with Robby & The Troubadors. For 3 years, they toured the United States. When the group broke up, Barry returned to Chicago.

He played piano and organ with Mike Bloomfield, Otis Rush, Junior Wells, the Miller-Goldberg Blues Band, and the Barry Goldberg Blues Band. A very nice interview with the Miller-Goldberg Blues Band is on page 50 of the May '66 Hit Parader.

Barry was supposed to tour in Bob Dylan's band shortly before Dylan had his motorcycle accident. Instead, Barry hung around New York, playing on recording sessions. He can be heard on Mitch Ryder's record "Devil With The Blue Dress On/Good Golly Miss Molly".

JACK

Jack Siamos, a Chicagoan since July 30, 1947, when he was born, always wanted to play the drums. He got a set when he was in the 8th grade and began banging and crashing away. He dug the James Brown Band, drummers and "all soulful music."

"I lived in a colored neighborhood so I heard their music all day long and got to know how the people lived," says Jack. "I worked in a band which, except for the saxophone player and myself, was all-colored."

Jack likes to listen to Chuck Jackson, Freddy King, The Temptations, Smokey & The Miracles, Dionne Warwick, Little Anthony & The Imperials and Wilson Pickett. He also considers Mitch Ryder and the Righteous Brothers the most soulful white singers.

He was the most logical choice for drummer of the Chicago Loop.

JOHN

John Savanna, a native of the Bronx, New York, born June 6, 1945, began playing the guitar when he was 14 years old. When he was 16, he started playing professionally on weekends. Ever since, he's been in many different bands, including a few where he was the leader.

"I kept getting more and more involved in music" John told us. "When I was 17, I was in a group that made a record, but it never did anything. I've always wanted to be in a group that had a successful record."

Alan Stroh, manager of the Chicago Loop, was looking for a lead guitarist. The manager of John's group called Stroh and John met the Loop.

"I dug their sound very much," said John, "and I felt 'Here's my chance'."

The rest is history. □

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1967 April 11 – Advertisement

The Café Au Go Go, 152 Bleeker Street, NY is advertising (from The Village Voice?): "Jam session tonite – Butterfield Band – The Cream – Eric Clapton – Mike Bloomfield and others. Adm. $3. Beg. 8 pm to 4 cont.". What a night! As it turned out, Bloomfield did not participate, it was "only" BB King, Eric Clapton and Elvin Bishop. In the interview below from May Elvin talks about the evening. There is a picture from that night, showing the three aces. Usually Elvin is edited out of the picture (see CD booklet "Riding with the King").

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1967 May – Hit Parader.

Interview with Elvin Bishop about jamming with BB King and Clapton and taking over in BBB after Bloomfield and other stuff. 2 pages.

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1967. Sept. 22. – Los Angeles Free Press

Mike Bloomfield: Honkies Can't Dig Soul Music" 2 pages. By Bill Kerby from an interview with MB.

BILL KERBY

(The following is excerpted from an interview with Mike Bloomfield, lead guitarist of the Electric Flag. In deleted portions of the interview, which will appear in its entirety in the next issue of Scene magazine, Bloomfield traces his musical development and his split with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band to form the Flag. He discusses some of his favorite musicians, tells why he cancelled his recent Bowl appearance with the Mamas and Papas, and some of the joys and hangups of his art.)

MB: You know what I'd really like to do, man? I'd really like to work in places with colored people in them. I'm so sick of working in front of honkies man, I just can't stand it anymore.

BK: I saw about three or four blacks out in front tonight and I was thinking about you in relation to a mixed audience.

MB: In Chicago, where I first started getting together was a club called Big John's. It was a hippie club that was completely integrated. Just every sort of humanity possible and it was definitely integrated and everybody would get grooving together and the groove would get so mellow —it was the only club that I had ever been in my life that was like that. The onliest, onliest one and I dug that and I even dig more working in straight Negro clubs, straight spade clubs because that is the music that I play and that's the language, the dialect that I am speaking and those are the people that understand it.

I don't dig freaking out people. Freaking out the kids is not where my head is at. If they get freaked out and enjoy the music that's lovely, I'm very happy, but blues is a language and it is spoken and it is called a response thing. When I speak the language I expect a response, I expect screams and yells at appropriate moments, just like in bull fighting when an extreme hip varonica is going down, man, that audience screams because they know the language, they know the dialect, they know what they are supposed to do.

Did you ever hear of Charles Kyle's book The Urban Blues? When you're playing blues or R&B or a certain type of music it will invariably reach people who are familiar with that music, really familiar, man. For me with the social implications of the lyrics, the feeling and everything, you know, will freak them out, we will be telling it like it is and that's what we do. I want to tell it to ears that understand what we are talking about.

White people just don't know, they just don't know about anything. They suck entirely. Really generally, in everything, but in music it is a horrible thing. I'm glad that they're freaked out, I'm glad that they're enjoying themselves, but it's not where I would like to be, you know. I think if we played in exclusively colored places we'd be crow-jimmed half the time right out of the fucking scene, man.

In Chicago when I started learning how to play there was so much dues I had to pay, just so many cats rapped so badly and so hard that it just made me so up-tight—but there was just as many cats that took me by the hand and said, "Young man let me show you where it's at." Great famous blues singers just took me aside and said, "I'm going to straighten you out."

It straightened me right out, man. They did their best to do that and that's where I want to be but in this economy, in this fucked up country, the black man will forever be down unless a revolution takes place which it should, armed revolution.

Thank God there are Malcolm X's and Rap Browns around who are finally, finally getting the people together into revolution, because this economy and this country will never, ever, ever, ever, allow the black man to get anywhere. Like all Civil Rights bullshit, you were trained, I was trained, from birth to not be prejudiced. Yet these crackers up front who say, "fuck man I don't dig it, they're animals, man," they're up front enough so you know where they're at.

Like me, I pre-judge. Intellectually I can cancel out bias, but in my heart I have been so conditioned by this fucked up society that I pre-judge. I cannot look at a man and say "You are a man," just a plain man. I will pre-judge him, I'll say "You are a faggot, you're a Jew, you're whatever." I just spend half of my time just trying to clean my head up and really look at things in reality but of course the white community will never do this, man.

That's why we will never make it economically. That's why this country is so totally destroyed. You've got a stupid fucking cracker for a President. I mean there's no doubt when you hear the way he talks with a southern accent, he's a stinking lousy fucking cracker. I'm sure he attended a great deal of lynchings, and got off and came in his pants behind the thrill of seeing that body hanging there. Right in the music thing it's the same thing because the language we are speaking will never get across to the people who are supposed to hear it, it's just going to get worse and worse.

BK: That's really sad.

MB: In a way I really feel that I have learned well, that I've really paid my dues and that I can blow the blues with as much depth and soul and feeling as any man, yet I feel it is the black man's music and the fucking honkies have been capitalizing on it for years.

Man, do you know when John Coltrane died that the President didn't even talk about him on television? Can you believe that a major American artist, fucking Carl Sandberg died who is a great genius cat and who has been vestigal for twenty years, has been impotent, a used up scrotum of a man, you know, and like a living breathing genius of the highest caliber, one of America's finest artists of all time died and the President didn't even speak about it. I didn't even hear it on the radio, I didn't even hear it on the T.V. I'm really expecting L.B. Cracker to get up there and he should have made a speech, you know, "Today all America should hang your heads in sorrow because a great, great artist died." A hundred years from now they're going to know Coltrane. After L.B.J. is dead they'll probably know about that artist.

(Continued on page 20)

WHAT THE BLUES ARE ALL ABOUT

(Continued from page 14)

BK: You say you're playing Negro gigs. Eventually don't you have to spread the language or experience?

MB: No, because it's an enormous thing, man, it's too hard to understand a whole cultural dialect, to understand what lyrics mean. Like B.B. King's song "I Don't want a Sole Hanging Around My House When I'm Not Home" or "Laundermat Blues" by Albert King—those things have a valid, incredible meaning, like "Back Door Man," the cats that actually go out when the husband goes out to work and cop some pussy, man. This happens everywhere, every culture, every race; it happens.

The cat can write a song and understand exactly what you're talking about. I've seen shootings go down in clubs, I've seen shootings for, that very thing, a very simple matter of adultery and you sing these songs and kids will listen to it and not understand a word. They'll know the lyrics intellectually in their minds and they try to comprehend some meaning of those words, but they really don't understand.

When B.B. sings "I Don't Want A Sole Hanging Around My House" it's such strong lyrics, you know, "if you're sick, man, don't call the doctor, you just suffer until I get home." That's strong shit, that has some strong messages, man.

BK: What's the difference between The Doors doing "Back Door Man" and Wolf doing "Back Door Man"?

MB: Both people know what it is, they both really understand what it is. Wolf is singing it because Willy Dixon wrote it for him and told him to sing it, but he knows because he IS a "back door man" and a real pussy creep, and he's really into that.

Kids are getting more hip. Soul music is really moving them. I have never seen a more integrated radio thing. I'm amazed that Otis Redding is selling to white kids and Stax is an entirely integrated shop.

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1967 December – Hit Parader.
Interview (part 1) with Elvin Bishop. 2 pages.

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1968. April 6. – Rolling Stone.
Interview with MB (1st page missing). The conclusion of the interview is in the next issue.

playing second guitar. I felt it was being shitty and that was a drag. So I quit Butter, hacked around for a while and that was more of a drag. I wanted to get a band of my own. Always wanted to and so me and Barry Goldberg put a band together.

We knew this guy named Peter Strassa, that's three, and Nick the Greek [Gravenites], that's four. I knew Nick in Chicago. Harvey (Brooks) volunteered his services. I really didn't dig the way he played but I knew he was supposed to be really good. I'd heard him play folk-rock. Harvey's good. Harvey's learned a lot of how to play funky bass; he's on his way to being a master. Then we met Buddy [Miles]. Buddy's so good that no one could believe it. Best fucking drummer in the world, unbelievable. He wanted to play in the band. He asked and we said yes. We had the band and we had hired another horn player who is an amazing organ player . . . He played horn and then switched over to organ. And that's how I got the band.

We all lived here and I lost my ass—a fortune feeding and housing them. We worked and like the millions of ideas that I had never came true. The band sort of fell into the bag of a soul band because of Buddy's dominant personality. I kinda didn't dig it, but now I really dig it. The band has become an extremely good soul band. That's where it's going. There are a lot of good ideas which will come about eventually if the band gets to know each other. You've got to be thrown together a long time to get close and share knowledge. I thought the whole thing through, planning it out, I'm very influenced by producers, especially Phil Spector. I think it would be really better if the groups would produce themselves.

There's another thing. The Rolling Stones are a really good band, but, like, I consider them like a boys' band because they don't play men's music. They don't play professional music for men, they play music for young people, and even with their most intelligent material as a stimulant, they play music for the young. Then there's a whole other thing—the masters of music—the Beatles who slowly evolved to music for men with serious patterns and serious and curious ideas. There's no juvenality about it at all. They developed the pop scene. And soul music is as serious as you can get, even in its most frivolous moments.

Do you pay the boys in the band as sidemen or share the bread equally?

No one makes money, man. It's completely cooperative.

Are there a lot of hassles in a big band venture?

Millions of them. There's the ego hassles, the personality hassles. One cat is not as good as another cat.

Buddy . . . Buddy is a person who plays well, who sings well. Any band can be centered around him. He's got talent and feeling. It's very easy to get Buddy to be a star. Everybody is very familiar with R&B. It's quite easy to get Buddy over to that area.

That shit is really well ironed out now. We have had some weird changes, really weird changes. Everybody got really bizarre for a while and most of it ironed out. The problem is we're instrumentally really radioactive. Put a bunch of people in a room together and break it down and get it together and break all of that personal shit down. You gotta be able to really combine and catalyze yourself when you're playing together. You got to look at the other cat and get off right there. And the people are able to get off because the other cats are getting off behind you and your whole sound and your whole thing. There's got to be that kind of thing going very strongly. It's got to be that one thing, because if that doesn't happen it's all over. You can't make it.

You dug Albert King. You notice his band is absolutely nothing. They were dead schleps, dead schleps playing behind him and Albert was the only one who really measured up to Albert's own sound. It was like they were old tired blues players and it was a drag. But Albert was exquisite. It was weird to see this exquisitely exciting cat, Albert King, freaking out and all these kids digging him. Here, this whole vast audience of which he was unaware. He's been scuffling around the blues for all these years and his band, who weren't hip to it at all—I mean they didn't even care. It was just a bunch of white faces and that was a drag.

Everybody was willing to cooperate, but the groove has gotta be there. In other words, with Buddy it's very easy to groove. He's mixed up: sometimes it's easy to groove and sometimes it isn't. But when the groove isn't there, it's very hard. Once you establish the feeling, once everyone knows what he has to say, then it just becomes a matter of saying as best as you can say it, because you really say it right.

Why did you choose "Groovin' Is Easy" for your first single.

We did "Groovin'" because "Groovin'" . . . well for several reasons: One, because I had a really groovy arrangement in mind for it; number two, because groovin was the thing for a pop record, groovin all over the place. I figured well we got a pop record. In my opinion "Groovin'" is a great pop record, a really pop record from beginning to end. The horns, the guitar, the drums. I think the voice is a little old-timey, but it's a pretty groovy record and that's why we chose it. When we came out of the studio and we heard it, we though it was really good. I mean it blew our minds. Beautiful, big, lovely. I think it's the best thing we are ever going to do, popwise. But it wasn't released right which was a drag.

Who produced it?

We produced "Groovin'" ourselves.

What do you think of some of the current producers? What do you get from them?

I would like to be personally produced by Jerry Ragavoy in New York. He's one of the greatest soul producers. I've ever heard. John Simon, he produced some Dylan stuff. He's very heavy. Phil Spector, George Martin, cats like that know everything. They know every line, every cue, every idea. Every bit of percussion. They can constantly come up with original ideas. They understand the idiom; they understand the history of rock and roll; they know the board like they know their hands. It's an instrument to them. They know every sound.

What about John Court?

No, he's not that hip to rock for all those years. The sound is not as good as it could be for all those records, not as good as a Stones' record, as good as a Beatle's record, as good as a Motown or Stax record.

Those are the standards of the trade and I don't think his records are that good. John did a lot with the Butterfield records. I don't think he's a really groovy producer. I can see other producers who are much groovier, who with those artists would be much groovier. I think Jim Stewart, if not better, would be just as good. Or perhaps Jerry Wexler would be groovier. Something along the lines of the earlier Ray Charles things.

What you need is a cat who will say "well, dig man, you're not playing what's hip; there's a lot groovier bass line; dig what's happening today, why don't you try to get in a funkier heavy beat instead of that old shuffle beat because that's not what's happening; you can better groove with a little more groovy horn line." And that's where a producer should be at.

Are the differences between Butterfield's band and the Flag as easily characterized as the difference between soul music and the blues?

Yeah, not quite that easy. With Paul's band, we always wanted to play like a real professional blues band. The Electric Flag is a real blues band and it's in that bag. You get the soul feeling of Afro-American popular music. The Flag probably handles it about as good as it can be handled . . . and that's what the Flag can do other bands couldn't do. Paul's band had a unique thing: Paul could blend certain talents to make the unique sound that is the Butterfield Band and which it has today but the sound of the Butterfield Band is really more standardized than it was when I was playing with it. I played further out riffs. Now it's a little more standardized except they freak out a bit, sort of a not-really-jazz but jazz-oriented on some things. I don't know. In my opinion, our band is sort of leaving them behind. In ours a lot of ideas — as well as personalities — have blended together.

Herbie, our organ player, is a monster on keys, really heavy. He will get to be just as good as anybody. He plays like Hendrix plays guitar.

Some of your best stuff is Stax material. Even though your group is larger and more complex, do you find a strong similarity in your group to the Stax house band?

No, because they have a very weird concept of exactly what they want to do in just the area where they're working. They are directed and guided by a different combination of talents, Duck Dunn, Al Jackson. They have been playing that way since they were in high school together. Seven years is a good thing. Look at the Beatles going on for years. Stax will go on; Nashville will go on. The reason is that they bothered to find really good things. They bothered to find the best possible. When I first heard "Hold On, I'm Coming," well I heard a new type of singing. I mean Sam and Dave. I mean I hadn't heard anything like that since I heard some of those cats on Arhoolie Records or something. Those cats have voices like steel and young leather or something. Otis was so unique, so individual, you know, and like that's where Stax is at.

It's like with Motown, except that Motown is a little more shitty, like, really more and more sugary. Except that Motown is like, well there's hope. Motown is trying to be funky now like with "I Heard It Through the Grapevine." On that they are funkier than blues and playing as about as down home as you can get that's really voodoo music, man, boogaloo music. All music is extremely sophisticated. There's no primitive music made anymore, you know, in popular American music. The most primitive thing I remember hearing was like the Troggs, they were pretty primitive you know.

Do you do any Motown material?

I think the one we do is "Uptight." I'd like to do "Reach Out For Me." It's a very soulful song.

It seems like you do a lot of Stax material.

We do it, yeah. We do it once in a while. We do "Loving You Too Long" That's a Stax thing . . .

You do "Knock on Wood."

No, No we don't do that. I don't know. We don't do many Stax things. I sing a couple of them. We do our own things, dark blues. I want to do all kinds of things, American music. That's our thing, American music, whatever strikes our fancy, whatever there's no staying in one bag when there are way lot more things to do.

Are you interested in modern country music?




Yeah, of course, because Harvey and I really dig it. I know a lot about it. I played with bluegrass bands. I really love country music, I'm really into it, I adore it. I love country singing and writing, and it's styles. Today it's better than ever, except that today there stuffing it with strings and stuff. Cats in that field are beautiful, like the young Buck Owens imitators.

The cats after Buck, Merle Haggard, David Houston, Tammy Wynette, great, great singers. I definitely want the band to that music, I really want to do American music. Have you ever dug Lonnie Mack or "Where There's a Will There's a Way," or "Why Not Tonight?" by Jimmie Hughes? That's like country music, but it's soul music too. It would be a little of each; it would be an intelligent hybrid. Like I dig the horns to play like steel guitar.

Have you any interest in the sitar?

No, I can't give up my life. You know I'd have to sit down and just do that. Man, it's too heavy.

Jerry Garcia incorporates a country picking style into his playing and the Dead do a couple of fine rocked-up country songs. Have you ever wanted to incorporate country sounds in that way?

Sure, I fucking love country music. I love it. There's really dimensional form. I like it all, I like even the the most insipid period of country music, country swing. Are you hip to that? . . . Spade Cooley and Bob Willis and the Country Playboys whatever or Texas Playboys. I dig walks, chicken walks, stuff like that.

I could play almost every song, man, I know country music up the

ass on the guitar. I could play about every country style guitar there is: old Flatt, picking, Travis picking, Chet Atkins, right on down to chicken picking. I have played a lot of country music, I have played it for years. I could put it into my guitar playing, but I don't want to. I won't play country music. Well, one of our tunes has it in there. I'll play country music, when we play country music. I sort of prefer to remain relatively valid to the idiom unless it adds to idiom like when Ray [Charles] does country music. I would put country guitar into the same way Ray does country music. When Ray does country music man, it was good spade-oriented country music.

Do you see the differences between soul music and the blues?

Absolutely, the difference is quite clear. Soul is from the church; soul music's whole trend has singing like church music, no snaps, melisma, a lot of notes. Monosyllable singing, extreme virtuosos of the voice. It's right after gospel singing. . .

And Aretha is the perfect representation of that.

Of course, man, she's a monster. She's like the best of that type of singer. But all the new soul singers man, all the best, like Sam and Dave, all sing like fucking preachers. They're gospel singers is what they are. Blues is secular, not religious, right? Blues is a secular music. It's a bar music. It's a simpler thing you know. Even the blues today is getting kind of soulful. I don't mean soulful, I mean gospel-oriented. It's decidedly different structure-wise, right down the line. Soul songs preach a sermon, tell the story . . . blues tell the story, but it's much more accurate, it's like a newspaper. It says 'this is what happened.' There's not that much velocity involved. It's more accurate reporting maybe using different words . . . while soul music is really different you know it's more of a preaching, Joe Tex, velocity. It's like "The Love You Save." Just a beautifully, superbly written music for the Negro masses. Soul music is more behind the church.

Has this led you into the purer forms of Gospel music?

Lately, man, yeah I've gotten extremely into Gospel music, just plain Gospel music. That's my favorite music today in the whole world. I think that's the most happening thing in the world now. It was the best singing in all of American Music, those are the best. I mean Gospel singers, real good Gospel singers, they have the same voice, like Yma Sumac, or like an opera singer, except they sing in a more funky way. I find like listening to Eddie Jackson. Oh man . . . . I'll play you a record by the Swan Silvertones. Man, the voices are unearthly.

What singers and groups would you recommend for someone who was interested in learning about gospel forms?

I would recommend the Silvertones, Blindboys, any of those groups, they're all top notch gospel groups. The Staple Singers are a little hokey for my taste. Now, they are very good, they have their own thing. They're real folky, too. Mavis is about as exciting a female singer as ever walked on this earth. It's just that I think there are groups that are better than that . . . like the blindboys, they're really groovey, The Soulstirrers are another, they are really heavy. Little Richard is a very poor gospel singer.

How did you get involved with the blues? What was happening then in Chicago from which so much new blues talent has come?

Well, I'll tell you a little bit about the Chicago blues scene, the white Chicago blues scene. The whole story as best as I can remember it. Now what originally went down, the first cats I knew on the scene—there were several areas, where there were people interested in blues in Chicago—the collectors, and the record cats, the historians and the discoverers who somewhere in their life realized that they were living in a city that was fraught with the real shit—all the old cats on the records that had moved out of Pigeonfoot, Georgia—and had ended up in Chicago. And I was one of those cats, like Bob Kessler and Pete Welding. There were a whole lot of people. And then there were cats around who were folkies, esoteric folkies, who put blues among other esoteric, ethnic folk music.

Was Charles Keil one of those cats?

Charlie Keil, yeah, Charles was one of those cats. And then there were a very few cats who dug blues because they were living in that neighborhood and there were nothing but spades around and they dug hanging out in the bars. And there were a few cats like that. The first cat on the scene that I picked up on—the old granddaddy of the white Chicago blues scene—was Nick the Greek. Nicholas was from the West Side man, a very tough Polak neighborhood, like they were smoking reefers. And the next cat down there on the really tough scene was Butter [Butterfield] and like Butter wanted to play harp. And he went down there when he was a young man, right down on the street which was the hardest fucking scene in the world, the baddest, filled with bad motherfuckers. He went down there. Butter went down there with his harp and sucked up to Junior Wells, and Cotton and Little Walter. After a bit Butter got better than them. At that time Butter was going to the University of Chicago; but he spent most of his time on the street and I felt that for all practical purposes, Butter was just a tough street spade—like Malcolm X—a real tough cat, man.

At that time I was hanging around the folk scene, with the ethnic folks freaking out with "Little Sandy Review," flipping out with Gary Davis and Lighning Hopkins and folk music. Oh man, everything from Woody Guthrie to the country blues. That's where I was at. But basically my heart really belonged down there, with blues singing. Because that was like rock and roll but only a million times better. That was the real thing.

When I was around eighteen years old I had been sort of messing around and Paul sort of accepted me. Well, he didn't really accept me at all, he just sort of thought of as a folky jew boy, because like Paul was there and I was just sort of a white kid hanging around and not really playing the shit right, but Paul was there man. I guess that was about where the scene was at and I didn't know many people, I just knew Paul and Nick and Elvin (who was working with Paul at that time) and a few folkies. Then when I was around eighteen this cat, Charlie Musselwhite, came up from Memphis and he dug blues too. He was from an old blues scene at home in Memphis. Mostly it was like Paul's scene, in which he hung around with Furry Lewis and other old blues singers. I was also pretty much, by this time, pretty blues conscious.

I was managing this club and every Tuesday night I'd try seriously to have concerts with Muddy Waters and Sleepy John Estes, all the blues singers in Chicago that I could get hold of, that I'd ever met or tried to meet. I tried to get especially the rare cats. . .

I was around eighteen and got this band together. We played a year with Big Joe Williams. I played piano with them and Charlie played harp. Eventually Joe left and when we worked there, we played nothing but blues.

The band was Charles, and this cat from the Sopwith Camel named Norman Mayall who is from Chicago, yeah . . . and this bass player who was from a Roy Rogers' band. Mike Johnson was the name of our lead guitar player. He was sort of a rock player, he sang rock and roll. When we got together we didn't play nothing but blues and we weren't real good, but we had a lot of feeling.

After that I left that club and went to another club, after playing there for a year, and gave Butter my gig there. I said, "Listen, my gig's done there, why don't you work there?" Butter had a band that had a sound all its own, an out of sight band, the best band to ever come down in that area, tight, tough, blew everybody's mind. So Butter played there. And right after that, cats started saying that the white groups were really getting down to it, because the rules had been laid down: you had to be as good as the spades in town; you had to be as good as Otis Rush, you had to be as good as Buddy Guy, as good as Freddie King, whatever instrument you played at that time, you had to be as good as they were. And who wanted to be bad on the South Side? Man, you were exposed all over. I mean right in that city where you lived, in one night you could hear Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, Buddy Guy, Otis Rush, Big Walter, Little Walter, Junior Wells, Lloyd Jones, just dozens of different blues singers, some famous, some not so famous. They were all part of the blues, and you could work with them if you were good enough. If you wanted to gig, that's where you went and that's where you worked, and like all these cats, man, these white kids in Boston, like Geoff Muldaur was playing the blues, and in New York Bob Dylan and his cats were playing their thing of the blues.

But like in Chicago they were playing the real blues because that's where they were working; they were working with the cats. Corky Siegal, and Jim Schwall, who are not really good, worked a year in Pepper's Lounge, one of the funkiest clubs, for a year as a novelty act. Corky played the drums and the piano. Applejack, cats you don't know about. Chicago Slim, and Steve Miller and all the cats in Steve's band.

The thing is all the Chicago musicians played the blues and all the other cats were imitators. We were playing right along with them and an imitation just could not do. It had to be the real thing, it had to be right. They had to stand up. It was Buddy Guy playing just two doors down from you. You wanted to burn him if you could, you know, you just wanted to get up there and burn him off the stage. I think it was very healthy.

What professional bands did you play with or sit in with at that time?

Millions of them. It would take a day to give you all the names. I didn't play with as many as many cats did, because I got my own band. I stayed with them for two years. We were signed John Hammond and we recorded for Columbia. And it was really weird . . . we looked like the Stnes then you knew . . . really long hair . . . and outlandish clothes . . . this was years before the Stones and it was never issued. They never issued a fucking track that we cut.

Did you play with about all the the major blues men?

Millions of them, really, millions of blue cats. I played with them, I was helped by them. There are pictures of them on my wall; different cats who are special friends. Like Big Joe Williams, he was like a father, a close friend. With cats like Muddy, man, it's like seeing your old uncle. Seeing Muddy on the road or at a gig or something, it's like giging with the whole family or something, with your older brothers and uncles or something like that. It's a very close thing. The older cats have gotten a lot of work because the younger cats have talked about them, and said "man, you think I'm good, you should hear cats like Little Walter . . . man that cat can play harp." That what Butter said.

It's like me with B. B. They're at the Fillmore now. Man, they wouldn't be at the Fillmore if there weren't cats talking about them. The main reason you talk about them is because you love them. I know I love them. These cats who were so groovy to teach me and they were so groovy because they weren't satisfied with just the little white boy playing those licks. You had to be good in order for them to dig you. They just weren't happy, they weren't grabbed, just to se a white cat playing that music. That wasn't where it was at. It was when a white cat socked it to them. They'd yell at the right time and say that was the real shit. That's so good, man!

Do you get educated response from white audiences?

No, man, hell no. White people, are well, yeah I'm getting it now, so many people at the Fillmore and the Avalon have hear *B. B. King at the Regal.* They've heard enough live albums to know what's happening. But hell man, it's a call and response thing; you've got to know the vernacular. You gotta know what's going down. In an Indian thing you've got to know when a cat played a good way. If you were at a fuck-a-thon, you'd have to know when a good fuck went down to know what's happening. These kids don't know; they know a good show, they know when

you're down on your knees because they can see, (he's down on his knees) so something is happening.

But like when Buddy sings a line man, that just wrenches your heart out, when he bends his voice about ten fucking ways, goes from falsetto to bass, oh man, it just soothes your soul. For the first five years I remember that when I listened to records I didn't listen to anything but the guitar. I wouldn't even listen to records with horns on them, and that's where a lot of kids' heads are at. They just hear certain things, but to understand the whole vernacular, the whole mystique, the whole thing, that's a whole different thing.

Do you get good response from black audiences?

I don't know. We've never played for strictly spade audiences. We're good. We're a good rock and sock and soul band; we get good responses from almost anybody because we cook real hard, honestly. I think people like to see extravagantly planned plays, like the Who and Jimi. Like passion plays.

Much like the way Buddy sings "I've Been Lovin' You Too Long"?

Yeah, a play, exactly. Very much like James Brown falling to the ground with a cape thrown around his. A revival, a play. People like spectacles. In my opinion one of the most pleasing spectacles is to see a band playing their asses off, hard as they can, you can see them grinning. You can feel it driving you nuts and all that good hard driving energy. That's why I dig the Young Rascals. And that's especially what a spade audience thinks.

You said that "there's no white bullshit with Butterfield." He's set apart from all the rest of the white Chicago cats—why?

It's amazing. It's a sociological thing. He did it by so adapting himself to that environment, that he turned over, that he transformed, changed and anything that's in his background, is completely disolved, by the earnesty and the complete tough masculinity of the street. The world of the street, that dog eat dog world. He met it on its own terms and that set him apart. Very few other cats have gone through that experience and that's what set Paul apart. That's what I noticed about him immediately, he was there.

It's hard to put into words what the real blues is and what it isn't. It's when there's an absolute confidence about it and you're not studiously trying to cop something; you're not listening to a Robert Johnson record and trying to sound like it, you are merely playing the most natural music for you, the music you can play. If Paul opens his mouth to sing it would have to be blues, because that's his thing. That's the most natural thing for him to play. It's like breathing for him. He picked it up fast and just got better and better. And that's why I say there's . . . its a very entertaining sight. That's why I dig Otis, or the Vanilla Fudge, they work very hard. That's one thing white people who have seen us really dig: when we are playing good, we play our asses off. And it sounds good. We're really digging it, and digging it is a necessity. no white bullshit. It's just competely natural. At one time maybe it wasn't but by completely immersing himself in the environment, and in the competition of the environment, now it is.

How did you come to join his band?

Oh, well, I went to Magoo's and Butter was going to make a record and he wanted someone to play slide guitar on the record and I could play slide. He brought Paul Rothchild to listen to me and I played on the record.

I didn't dig Butter, you know, I didn't like him; he was just too hard a cat for me. But I went to make the record and the record was groovy and we made a bunch more records. One thing led to another and he said "Do you want to join the band?" And it was the best band I'd ever been in. Sammy Lay was the best drummer I ever played with. But whatever I didn't like about Paul as a person, his musicianship was more than enough to make up for it. He was just so heavy, he was so much. Everything I dug in and about the blues, Paul was. There he was: a white cat as tough as he could be and it was a gas. So we went to Newport right after that and I was going to play with Dylan, you know, it was a choice between Dylan and Butter and I chose Butter because that's where my head was. That kind of music.

Who do you think are the best blues musicians? The top two or three cats?

Ray and B.B. I mean I could name a million cats, but there's no one better than Ray Charles or B. B. King. They are the last word.

Do you consider yourself primarily a bluesman or a rock and roll star?

In my own head, I'm a bluesman, because that's what I play the best and that's what I dig the most and can play the most authoritatively. I think finally, at last, I've reached an understanding about and with my guitar. I just know all about it now. I finally know all about it. As a music form and as a social scene, man I just know it, it's in my heart. But yeah, I am a rock and roll star.

Why did you leave Butterfield?

I flipped out. And like Elvin was uptight. So I left and when I went home, it was even worse. And besides, I wanted to get a band of my own. I had a lot of ideas that are mine. I saw cats like Buddy who is so heavy I was content to do Buddy's thing. It's such a pleasure. It was a delight just to play that music. Like I really didn't know shit from soul music. I didn't know anything about it. I never even listened to it before. I just dug blues.

You're of course hip to Aretha. She's operating in the same area as your band.

I don't think she is really. She's more New York than she is Memphis because her records don't sound like the Memphis sound. They are a little more complex. She's very gospely. Aretha is the last word. She's the best female R&B singer. The Supremes have syrupy voices and Martha's all right . . . but Aretha will sock it to you; she's the hardest of them all. She has the most dynamic voice, the most engaging style. She's sexy, she's a red hot mama. She's not slick or anything; She's just soul. In a way it's kinda unhealthy, it's kinda Uncle Tommy. When she sings Dr. Feelgood, that's where she's at. While the Supremes are the other thing, you know they're the urban Negro, airline stewardesses or something like the Kim sisters. So like its a very weird sociological thing.

Soul music is more popular now than it ever was before. Do you think this will be the direction of rock and roll and dominate all styles?

No. Just as important are long head pieces. Soul music is heart music, it's not head music. Just as happening are Simon and Garfunkel.

Then there's the hybird. There's the English soul, you know, Procul Harum with their soulful voices. No, I don't think it's going to be the trend; I don't think it will ever get to the white heart, the big record buyer, the white adolescent heart. He just can't amplify his movement enough. You know, he can dig it and love it and buy it, and dance to it and boogaloo to it, and shake himself, and come with his girlfriend to it. But that's not where his head is. Because when he goes to bed, when he or she goes to bed, at night, it's Herman who she wants to be fucking. Certainly not Sam and Dave or Albert King. And I think that basically that's where they identify. You know, kids can identify with wild funky shit. They much more readily identify sexually and personally with a white person than like with Otis . . .

What you're saying is that it comes down to a racial thing.

I think yeah, it's definitely a racial thing. I think kids are to the point . . . like kids around today are very much more enlightened, they smoke pot you know and they're enlightened to a great deal more sounds, sonority. They can be moved by many other things. It's musical value; like many kids wouldn't listen to spade groups a few years ago, "Why listen to a spade group? Let's go listen to beautiful Frankie Avalon." Now they'll listen to a lot of things. I think it's racial, but America is racial. It's a basic problem of identification. You must identify with something you can identify with. Kids can identify with the Beatles very easily.

Are bands like yours, Steve's, and even Paul's headed in an electronic direction?

They are headed in the direction of the amagamation of the personality between the bands. We've all heard the same licks; Steve, me, Paul, the English cats, we've all dug the same things, we've all dug the same records. If you question me or Steve Miller or Butter, or Krir, we probably all have the same favorite records basically and we've dug the same thing. It's the same influences that have come out.

Each cat has its own way of saying the same things. Whoever has dug more of different type of things, that's going to be where he's at. You take a little baby and put him in a white cotton box and he'll have a very limited horizon. You take someone who's dug a lot of ways and that's going to come out in his music. He's going to come on with a lot more than a cat who's only been listening to one kind of music. So it's very hard for me to predict.

There's a whole host of white soul bands that are completely unheard of. No one has ever heard of them. Like Lane Cochran and the C. C. Riders. Millions of them, all over the south and the mid-west, who play nothing but Top-40 soul music, with horns and singing it just like the record.

Like Mitch Ryder?

Exactly, but heavier than Mitch, way better than Mitch. Years, man, this has been happening in America for years. Bill Haley was one of the first of those type bands, like Joe Turner sort of. Those cats play the same circuit of lounges in Vegas and Miami. I don't know, I run into them and they play fabulous. Really professional, but they play that Top-40 shit. They stay with whatever is happening at the time because they really don't have it. I mean, like once in a while you hear a group like the Vanilla Fudge, you know just these guys from New York, who can really follow that New York Italian pattern, you know Dion and the Belmonts or Jay and the Americans, who are Jewish, but fell into that same pattern. Sort of a Four Seasons type of thing. but they didn't. They took after the Rascals, they took a little of their own personalities.

Do hear much of interest in jazz?

Sort of. I tried. I didn't dig it. I mean it's fantastic musicanship, very heavy, but I really don't dig it that much.

The thing that strikes me is that it's so "tired."

Yeah, it's over. I'm much more folk-oriented — I want someone to speak to me on clearly definable terms, that I understand with very little oblique shit.

Do you do much song-writing?

Yeah. I write sometimes like Stax songs. I wrote one we did on our album. It's for Steve Cropper. I do all kinds of song writing.

How did you end up doing the sessions on Highway 61?

Well, I met Dylan at this funny little club called the Bear in Chicago just after his first album came out. The liner notes described him as a real hot shot, you know, a real great guitar player. And I heard the album and it sounded just shitty. He came to Chicago and I welcomed the opportunity to go down there and cut him. So I went to see him in the afternoon to talk to him and he was really nice. He was just so nice. I saw him at a few parties and then out of the clear blue sky, he called me on the phone to cut a record which was "Like a Rolling Stone." So I bought a Fender, a really good guitar for the first time in my life, without a case, a Telecaster. And that's how. He called me up.

And then?

Then I went with Butter and it was over until the next session. Dylan is very weird about loyalty you know. Like he sort of felt I belonged with him and I did too. But I didn't. He's a very weird cat. Albert manages both of us. Like when I played with Bob, I didn't know anything about that kind of music. But I think I could play with a him a lot better now.

The conclusion of The Rolling Stone Interview with Mike Bloomfield will be carried in the next issue.




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1968. June – Hit Parader.
Article “Impressions Of Bob Dylan” by Mike Bloomfield. 3 pages.
Interview (part 2) with Elvin Bishop. 2 pages.

June 1968

Impressions Of
BOB DYLAN
by Mike Bloomfield

When I first listened to Bob's "John Wesley Harding," I didn't like it too much. The second time I listened more attentively and I really dug it, because old Dylan has really learned how to sing. On that song, "Down On The Cove," he sounds like Percy Mayfield. The best song is the one with the line "kick your shoes off, get another bottle of wine and climb up on the bed." It's a ragtime kind of song with a steel guitar. Although Bob comes through as a very good singer, the album is poorly recorded and the sidemen aren't playing too well. That's because Dylan doesn't give them a chance to play. He doesn't run the songs down with them. Some of the changes are boring but he's showing the world he can sing.

He doesn't seem to be progressing. To my ears, there isn't a marked difference in his writing. Just his singing is better, and the words and his voice have come together. His images were much better on "Highway 51 Revisited." That song in particular and "Subterranean" is pure Dylan imagery. Sort of William Burrough's surrealism.

This album is calm Dylan. Post-electric, calm, together, Dylan. His other things were more frantic and that's more appealing as far as imagery goes.

There were spots where he sounded like Jerry Lee Lewis singing. When he wants, he can get into a good rock and roll groove, with electric instruments, and shout and be a really great rock and roll singer. Even in the old Elvis Presley style. He probably did this album without a band merely to go in the studio and get his songs out. Be as expedient as possible. He just got his new songs together and his singing, and went down to Nashville and did it.

He probably hasn't lost interest in the rock band. Judging from my experience with Dylan's rock band sessions, he never really gets with the band. We just learned the tunes right there, he sang and we played around him. He never got with the band so that we could groove together. There was no real empathy with the beat or between Dylan's singing and the groove of the band. If he got into it with the band, he'd be an unbelievable, cool, rock and roll singer. Maybe he's had bad band experiences or he won't let himself work with the band. He always seems to be fighting the band on a lot of his tunes.

Dylan is a hero because he tells the truth. He says all the little things that a kid knows are happening. Dylan says, this is what's happening. "Hey kid, this is what's going down in your mind, this is what's happening in your little life." On "Like A Rolling Stone" he tells it all. That's such an old story. And, "Baby, I Just Wanna Be Friends With You," every word of it is the truth. The kids hear him singing exactly what's on the bottom of their minds, what they dwell upon in the midnight hour, and old Dylan is just telling it to them in his song. That's why Lenny Bruce and Malcolm X. and John F. Kennedy were heroes. They were truthful.

When Dylan first came to New York, he was just skuffling to get work. He was into different music then - protesting and all that. But that was the truth, too. He saw what went down in this country and he wrote songs to show what was bad. I don't think he's interested in that stuff any more. I believe that he just wanted to be a rock and roll star right from the beginning. He was born and raised in America. His influences are all media and communication and he's a rock and roll star incarnate. He could be a sexy hip-shaking idol just like Elvis. Somewhere in the bottom of his head that's what he really wanted to do when he was fourteen. He really wanted to be Elvis. A lot of years have passed since then but it's still in his head.

For years, Bob, myself and lots of other guys were just digging the music when we were teenagers. We were digging facts and styles and music history. Then suddenly one day it stopped being a hobby or a favorite pastime. Suddenly Dylan was just playing and singing and it became the most important thing. Bob's singing became the most important thing he had to offer. He stopped doing other people's songs. He left Woody Guthrie and his favorite folk music behind and sang his own songs. That came first over everything else. He realized, "My main thing is this because this is what I do best. This is the most fertile thing in my head. It keeps regenerating and it stays fertile. So I'm going to do it." So once he got his lyrics, music and concepts together, there was [illegible] doubt in his mind. That was absolutely it. He became a poet, and just talked when he felt he was so good he wanted to be heard.

Now, I read his book, "Tarantula," I don't know if it's going to be published or not, but I didn't like it. It's completely into imagery, reminding me of William Burroughs, but more inexplicable than Burroughs. I could hardly understand it. Maybe I'm not hip enough.

There is sort of a parallel between the book-writing and his lyric-writing. He could probably sing stuff from the book, but actually he can sing anything. That's his premise. Shakespeare can be sung. Phil Ochs walks around with a big book of poetry and he's singing it all the time to different changes. I think Dylan can sing any one of his thoughts — like opera which is just the singing of dialogue.

Dylan is mainly a poet. His singing is unnecessary. He sings because more people will hear his poetry. If he was just a poet, and never sang, like Leonard Cohen, Dylan wouldn't have the exposure. Dylan's hip enough to know that media is where it's at. His thoughts are much more accessible to the mind because he sings his poetry.

His movie, "Don't Look Back," was stone Dylan. A little of it, just a little, was pretentious because he knew he was being photographed. I chuckled all through the movie because I remember what Dylan was like. That movie is Dylan.

I first met Bob at a Chicago club called "The Bear," where he was performing. I went down there because I had just read the liner notes on one of his albums that described him as a "hot-shot folk guitar player, bluesy, blah-blah-whee, Merle Travis picking, this and that." The music on the album was really lame, I thought. He couldn't sing, he couldn't play.

I went down to the Bear to cut him with my guitar. I wanted to show him how to play music, and when I got there I couldn't believe it. His personality. He was so nice. I [illegible] there with my wife and we just talked. He was the coolest, [illegible] and Elvis' first records and rock and roll. Here was this [illegible] could see then that

(ABOVE) DYLAN'S BAND, THE CRACKERS (FORMERLY THE HAWKS) ARE LEFT TO RIGHT: LEVON HELM, RICK DANKO, BOB DYLAN AND ROBBY ROBERTSON. NOT PICTURED ARE RICHARD MANUEL AND GARTH HUDSON. (BELOW) DYLAN AND MIKE BLOOMFIELD DURING ONE OF DYLAN'S FIRST "ROCK BAND" RECORDINGS.

he was going to be stone famous, a huge star. He was a nervous, crazy guy but he was so nice it was just staggering. He asked me to play some Sleepy John Estes stuff on my guitar, but I couldn't do it.

Then I met him a few more times at parties, and one day he called me and asked if I'd play on his record. I went to his house first to hear the tunes. The first thing I heard was "Like A Rolling Stone." He wanted me to get the concept of it, how to play it. I figured he wanted blues, string bending, because that's what I do. He said, "Hey, man, I don't want any of that B.B. King stuff." So, OK, I really fell apart. What the heck does he want? We messed around with the song. I played the way that he dug and he said it was groovy.

Then we went to the session. Bob told me, "You talk to the musicians, man, I don't want to tell them anything." So we get to the session. I didn't know anything about it. All these studio cats are standing around. I come in like a dumb punk with my guitar over my back, no case, and I'm telling people about this and that, and this is the arrangement, and do this on the bridge. These are like the heaviest studio musicians in New York. They looked at me like I was crazy. Al Kooper was there. I didn't know who he was then. It was his first break, too. I thought he was a famous session cat. But Dylan remained completely isolated from that. He just sang his tunes and they fitted the music around him.

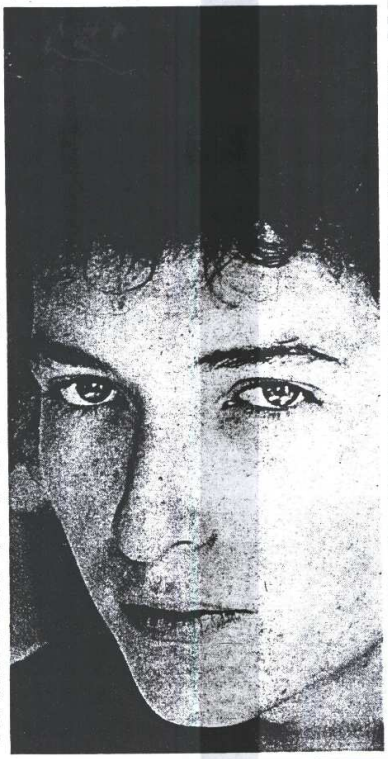
As far as I can remember, I never saw any communication between Dylan and the band - ever. There are songs like "It Takes A Train To Cry" and "Like A Rolling Stone," where there seems to be some sort of communication. It happened almost by mistake. On everything else they could have had muzak going, or an electric machine that went through the changes.

The final upshot of this came at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. I was supposed to play with either Dylan or Butterfield. Albert Grossman had just signed Butter, so I figured he'd make the choice. Now I was already in Butter's band and Dylan asked me to play with him. Here's where we misundertsood each other. I figured Albert would tell me who to play with, where I'd be the most effective, but he left the choice up to me. I said, "OK, man, I'm a blues guitar player and I have an obligation to Butter, so I have to play with Butter."

Now here's a weird thing about Dylan. Prior to that Newport thing he was always introducing me to his friends as "the best guitar player in the world." It was sort of funny. Then one day I saw him with Roby Robertson, his new guitar player, at the Cafe Au Go Go. I walked over to him and he introduces me to Roby, who I already knew, and Bob says "Hey, Mike, I want you to meet the best guitar player in the world." I think that's what Bob is all about. He wants loyalty. If you say you're going to do something with him and you don't do it, he gets very brought down. He figures he's being betrayed.

Now I'd love to do a record with Dylan. I know I could get him into it.. Get him cooking, wailing with the band. Having a ball, getting the band to push him instead of fighting him. I know where his music and his words are at now. I'd handpick a band to go into the studio with Dylan. I'd use Al Kooper, Barry Goldberg, Buddy Miles and a couple of other guys. We could really cook. But it will never happen because he has a band.

I don't know who's playing guitar on "Visions Of Johanna" but it's terrible. He should have played lyrical stuff like Marty Robbins. But he played funky guitar licks and it sounds terrible. You can't playjust one thing behind Dylan. With his writing there has to be all kinds of different music going. You have to set a different mood for each song, a mood that will make him comfortable.



He's a mysterious cat. It's weird when you're working with a genius. When you're talking to him you just know that he's seeing everything. His little eyes are seeing every bit of truth and every bit of bull and he's categorizing it, working with it, understanding it. He's a genius and it's very strange to know a cat like that.

Dylan exudes this force, this very magnetic thing. You can feel his strong mind. He's a beautiful guy.

When I saw him for the session, he had this tiny old wooden house in Woodstock, New York way out in the country. It was a little two-room hut, like a log cabin isolated out in the woods.

When he had the motorcycle accident he laid up there for a long time. He had his neck in a brace and he just got scraped up a little. He just didn't want to go out in front of the kids any more. In my opinion, he stopped playing because the crowds would yell at anything. It didn't make sense to play any more. It was just for the money.

The kids had heard his songs, so they just wanted to see his flesh. They wanted to tear his shirt or pull a guitar string off. It had very little to do with his songs and it got to be a lame scene, so he stopped playing. (That's why Dave Crosby stopped playing with the Byrds.)

Now a colored audience always has an honest interest in the music. Even when it's James Brown, the idol, they come to hear James' soul. They're not there to tear his clothes or "let's freak out, that's James Brown." James Brown could come out with swans and strings and balloons and wear a clown outfit - anything - but to the people it would still be James.

Dylan's kids aren't there to hear Dylan's soul. The kids got dragged with Dylan when he got a band.

But Dylan figured, "Hey, this is groovy, not going out there up against those kids. I'm gonna lay up for a while and dig it." He must have writtens tons of stuff then. He's always scribbling little things on paper. His brain is so alive. You can almost see electricity pulsing out of his eyes. I sure would like to be his friend again. □

mike & jim

(Latest album/John Wesley Harding – Columbia)

1968 October 3 – Down Beat.
In an article: "John Lee Hooker: Me and the blues" there is a picture of JLH and MB.

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1968. June – Rolling Stone?
Article: Impressions of Bob Dylan, by Mike Bloomfield. 3 pages.

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1968. Sept. 28. – Billboard.
Review of The (reformed) Chicago Loop's concert at Arthur, NY, Sept. 15. (No MB)

Billboard | 9-28-68

For 'New' Chicago Loop, Music's the Main Thing

p. 12

NEW YORK—The Chicago Loop, changed in membership, showed it still places a premium on musical values as it closed a two-week engagement at Arthur on Sunday (15). In its second set, the young Mercury quartet handled familiar material, but gave it new interpretations.

An example was Tim Rose's "Morning Dew." Bob Slawson, group leader and principal vocalist, used his strong voice effectively as drummer P. J. Bailey and bass guitarist Stephen Wasserman gave the piece a stronger beat than usual. Then came an extended instrumental section with lead gutiarist Jackie Dana having a chance to show his considerable talent. Bailey also performed well throughout. But, in Wasserman, the unit has one of the finest young bass players around as his work in every number clearly demonstrated.

Dana also did his share of singing with Joe Tex's "The Love You Save" with "That's the Way Love Is" being his best blues selection. A powerful "You Got to Bring It With You When You Come" ended the set as Slawson, the only member of the original group, alternated on harmonica and vocals.

The members left the stage one at a time, first Slawson leaving three instrumentalists, then Dana leaving the stage to the strong rhythm performers. Electronic sounds were added as Wasserman exited. Although primarily a concert unit, the Chicago Loop also impressed as a discotheque quartet. They also played the Cafe Au Go Go on Tuesday (17). **FRED KIRBY**

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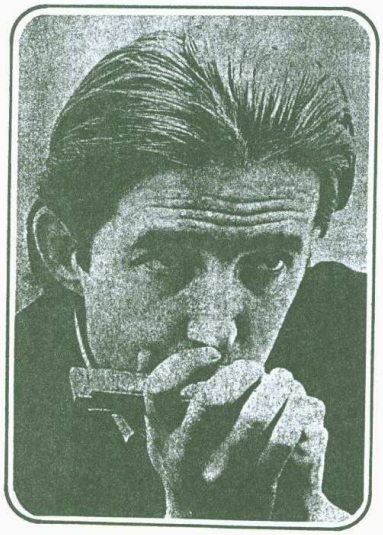
1969 – Hit Parader
Interview with Paul Butterfield

Blues With A Feeling

I intended to interview both Jimmy Cotton and Paul Butterfield together, but Cotton was exhausted when I arrived, because he'd just come back from doing a Ban Deodorant Commerical. Although Butter did all of the talking, Cotton was present and nodded in approval throughout.

It's a pretty tasty interview considering Butter is not known to be the most articulate of musicians.

An Interview With PAUL BUTTERFIELD



HP: Where did you first meet James Cotton?

Butter: We met on a reservation (laughter). He was with Muddy Waters band then, that was about 1957.

HP: What do you mean, a reservation, was that the name of a club?

Butter: No, I was thinking of--there was this Apache reservation out in Phoenix, Arizona where we played this club called JB's and cowboys and Indians, real cowboys and Indians used to come down and hear us. That has nothing to do with it, really, where we got together was in Chicago and we used to play a lot of the same gigs. I was working in a show band at the time.

HP: What do you mean, a show band?

Butter: Its where you all wear the same uniforms and play lounges and stuff.

HP: Its interesting that you met Cotton while he was with the Muddy Waters band. Almost every musician I've spoken to mentions Muddy as one of their most important influences. It seems that he inspired a great deal of blues oriented music that is today's pop.

Butter: I don't think so. I did listen to Muddy a lot, I really dug him. I don't think its his playing that influenced me so much as his feeling did--there's so much feeling in his music. When I couldn't play any music, when I really wasn't very good on the harmonica I used to go down and play and cats who didn't know me or what I played wouldn't let me sit in. Muddy always let me sit in. But nobody sings or plays like Muddy Waters. The closest I've ever heard was Robert Johnson who was one of the greatest blues singers and guitarists Chicago has ever seen. He died when he was just about 21.

The thing is, when I was going down to see Muddy in Chicago--Cotton was playing with him then and a lot of really good musicians used to come and play with them all the time. There was a lot of interest, a lot of things happening. The blues was really a scene.

A lot of people who are aware of people like Muddy or Howling Wolf didn't know about him until this last year or two because things are just opening up now, its not just in Chicago any more. As a matter of fact the Chicago scene is really dead. But a lot of people like Albert King or B.B. King are a big influence on the pop scene, because Michael Bloomfield and Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix and cats like that have taken licks and things from their style and used it in their thing. But even though Muddy himself influenced me a great deal, sitting in with his band and all that, it has nothing to do with my harmonica style or anything. Little Walter and James Cotton and all those cats have their own thing going. The feeling is what's important, though, that's got to be there. I haven't really heard any young groups that play like Muddy Waters. I mean Muddy really had a great band, then, Cotton and Otis Spann were in it and a lot of heavy stuff went down.

HP: Elvin Bishop is really a distinctive guitarist. What do you think influenced his style the most.

Butter: Elvin is trying to do a number of things, trying to break through some of the barriers. There are a lot of guitarists in the midwest doing a new thing, like a jazz thing. That's why Larry Coryell is breaking through – because he's

using different things that are coming from different places and putting it into a jazz thing. Elvin is something else again, he's opening it up a lot. I've heard many guitar players who have more technique and more facility, but Elvin opens it up with feelings. He's only just developing a style.

I started out with Elvin. At that time he didn't play any guitar, he played harmonica. He started playing guitar in about 1960 and we used to hang out and play.

He's not with the group any more, though. He quit. He's out in San Francisco to rest for a few weeks and see if he can get something together. I think he's going to start his own group.

HP: Who's your new lead guitar, now?

Butter: A guy named Buzzy Fieton. He's from New York. He's 19 years old and he's a monster on the guitar. Really together. There are so many really young cats around now who can really play blues.

HP: Its kind of curious that so many younger musicians are into Chicago blues which is essentially a form that emerged about 30 years ago and is, say, music of the last generation rather than music of this one. That is, what is loosely termed 'rock', even though there is a lot of blues in it, is music of a contemporary generation and what you play is essentially an older form.

Butter: Blues is not an old or an older form. It has no label, its not Chicago or anything, its feeling. You play the music you feel. There's different ways of approaching it, naturally, some people spend years studying it but some people have a natural feel for the blues. For example, our piano player, he was born and raised in San Francisco and he's just got a natural feel for the blues. I've run into a couple of guitar players here in the Village that have just studied for the last two years, practicing the harp and things. I don't practice the harp any more, to tell you the truth, I just play it.

HP: I can see why you object to categorizing the music, but certainly you'd have to hear it somewhere. You play Chicago blues because essentially it was your environment.

Butter: Sure, you have to hear it and when you hear something you dig you play it, but it really doesn't matter where you are. Like the Chicago scene right now is really dead. But we were lucky, when I was there working and playing, everyone was playing blues. As a matter of fact at the time it was the only place anything was happening, except maybe at the Apollo Theatre in New York. They'd have, say, Lightning Hopkins or Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee in the Village but they'd never have any blues bands.

Take Albert King. He's not from Chicago, he's hardly ever in Chicago, but he plays some of the heaviest blues you can hear. Just as heavy as Muddy or Wolf or anyone that's been playing from Chicago.

HP: I would still say that there's a distinctive form to Chicago blues, its a recognizable sound. And there really has been no innovation as with rock groups who will pick up different kinds of instruments, like the sitar, which makes a drastic change in the character of the music. Blues bands stay pretty much with the same rhythms and instrumentation.

Butter: Well, right, its developing within its context, its not really innovating. But its going to develop into different things, naturally.

The thing about that kind of music for me is the feeling. I know cats in Chicago, especially young Negro cats right now, who don't want to play blues, they put down the blues. They want to do something different, a lot of them want to play jazz or top 40 or r&b stuff. They put down guys like Muddy and Wolf because they want to get away from that scene, the ghetto scene, I guess. See, they think its an old form too. I disagree.

HP: I'm curious about something else, too. Over the past few months several blues bands have added horns.

Butter: I started out playing in a band with horns and when I got my own band I talked about getting horns for a long time. I always wanted to work with them. Right after I added the horns, about a year ago, I guess it was, we cut that Pigboy Crabshaw album.

HP: Do you like that album?

Butter: Not particularly, no.

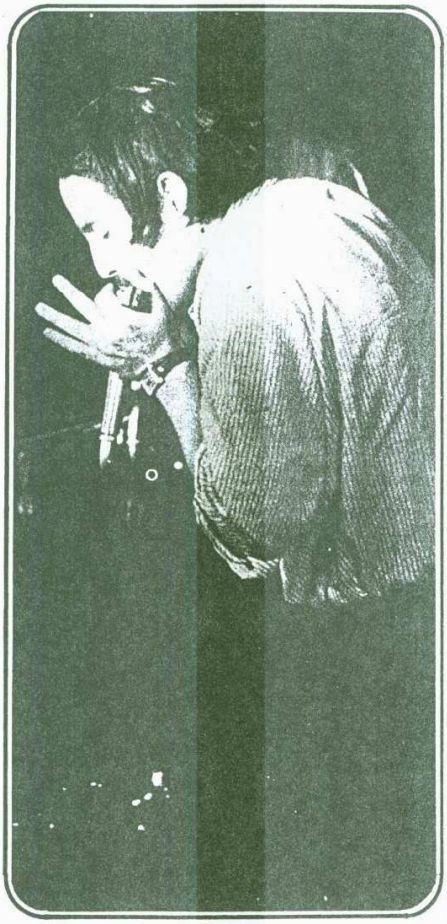
HP: Which is your favorite so far?

Butter: This next one coming up.

HP: Its finished?

Butter: Yes. And things are changing for me, I'm really learning about how to arrange the horns. The thing just naturally develops. Like we're playing the blues, but I think its really going someplace. I'm not really a purist, I like a lot of the things that Blood Sweat and Tears did with their horns.

HP: Well they did all kinds of material on their album, a Nilsson



song, for example, an entire orchestra in some parts, an r&b chorus and a string ensemble, to mention just a few things that don't fall into the category of blues.

Butter: Well, again, I wouldn't say that they were really a blues oriented band. Kooper can play some blues but the rest of them are not blues musicians. Bobby Colomby was with a show band, that's why his playing is so tight and Steve Katz doesn't really play blues. But their horn section is really beautiful stuff. Not just on their album, I'm really talking about them live.

Some people put me down when I got horns, they'd say "man, why'd you do that," but there's so many things you can do with the horns. We're playing a few things now that aren't really blues—like some jazz oriented stuff and spirituals. I really dig working with the horns. I don't dig having them just stand there and play along with us—that's why I don't like the Pigboy Crabshaw album too much. We went in and played the session without having the time to experiment with what we could really do with the horns. It was too new.

HP: Do you write charts for your albums or just do head sessions?

Butter: We play the things we've been working with so we have them down pretty much, we don't write charts or make plans or anything.

But I don't feel I used the horns like I could have if I'd had them a little longer. Like we have a tenor sax, alto sax and trumpet. The alto player plays baritone, tenor and flute, the tenor player plays flute and soprano and the trumpet player plays piano so we can really change around and get a lot of new things together. Like we could use two sopranos and a trumpet and the guitar player also plays a french horn.

HP: French horn!

Butter: Yes, we're really going to use the french horn. We're writing almost all of our own material now, we do a few old things like "Pity the Fool" off the last album. Things are changing with James Cotton, too—he was in Chicago for 12 years with Muddy and now with his own band he's out of that scene. Next year different things are going to go down, he's gonna have new tunes and everything. That was the thing about Chicago, it got so dead, nobody rehearsed, nobody played anymore or tried anything new. People who really wanted to stay with the blues got out of Chicago and that's how it opened up.

I do like the Pigboy Crabshaw album for one reason only. We just got in there and played, no going through any of this junk of overdubbing again and again.

HP: It was recorded completely live?

Butter: Right. That's the way I think all music should be recorded. Groups should cut live and play the thing, not overdub and use all kinds of tricks.

HP: I'm surprised you feel that way. I can understand it with a blues band, which is basically a spontaneous kind of music, but with something like the Blood Sweat and Tears album there were a lot of things on there that would have been a great strain to do live.

Butter: Sure it could have been done live. Have you ever heard Ray Charles' big band recorded? All of it is live. I'm not downing Blood Sweat & Tears, I really dig the group and the horn section and everything. But this Ray Charles sound was better and they did stuff that was really more difficult to play together, more involved, and it was all live, no overdubbing at all. There's more feeling when you're playing with another musician than playing with a tape. Every time you overdub you lose some of that feeling. What I'm into is playing live music, playing with my friends. I'm not just into production and overdubbing and all that. I could do that all the time, and I did do it for a long time, overdubbing on the harp, but I didn't like it as much as just playing.

HP: I think production techniques are one reason that records are so much better and more together than they used to be.

Butter: Sure. But look what's happened. You get a lot of groups that go into a studio for weeks, lay down a basic rhythm track, put in other instruments, put the voices in and add more stuff—but then they have a great record and they can't do the stuff live in performance.

HP: I guess that's right to a large extent. I remember how great the original Byrds records were, they had all this charisma from their albums but when you went to see them live it just lay there.

Butter: That wasn't their only trouble. Sure they did a lot of overdubbing and production tricks but they couldn't play live because they weren't competent musicians. I've heard bands that can play anything that they recorded and play it better live.

HP: How, then do you account for the fact that, just musically, the Byrds records were pretty together.

Butter: Well, you spend enough time in the studio – the first thing was, and really now, they brought in another bass player and another drummer to play on their records. A lot of groups do that, for instance the Monkees didn't play their instruments at all on their records.

HP: That's not a fair comparison at all. The Monkees were never a real group, they were a package. You can't compare them with a group that's serious about making music, at least in their intentions, if not in their musicianship.

Butter: I played with the Byrds a couple of times and they just couldn't play live together. Partly because they just didn't dig each other and partly because they couldn't play. Jim McGuinn is a good guitarist, but the rest of them couldn't play. I just didn't think they were any good. I like to play live and that's what I like to hear.

HP: I have to agree with you up to a point. Like the Beach Boys since they have decided they were 'art' don't have very much feeling to them. The sound is tight and slick and gimmicky but it gets to a point where it is all showmanship and no soul.

Butter: There is one cat in the Beach Boys, Brian Wilson, who does all the arranging and has all the ideas. But I talked to one of the other Beach Boys the other night and all he had to say about anything was "will it sell, can it be marketed?" It all had to do with producing and selling and money.

The only thing I think about music is that it should be honest. Honesty in playing and feeling is the most important thing about it. That's what it is for me and that's why I dig it so much. □ ellen sander

1969 June 26 – Down Beat.
Article by Don DeMicheal: "Up with the blues: Mike Bloomfield". 3 pages.
Review by Don DeMicheal: "Muddy Waters – Michael Bloomfield – Paul Butterfield".
From the live part of "Fathers and Sons" session.

down beat
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GUITAR PICKINGS: BLUES / JAZZ / ROCK

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- Tiny Grimes: Unsung Giant
- Phil Upchurch: Studio Soul

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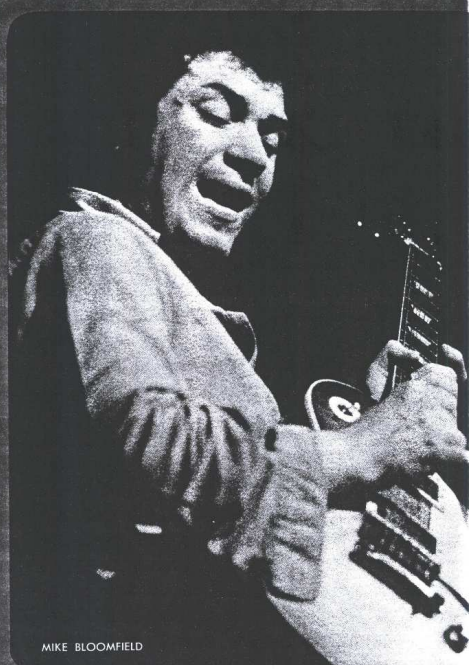
- Wes Montgomery's "Tear It Down"
- New Chart For Guitar Ensemble



MIKE BLOOMFIELD

UP WITH THE BLUES: MIKE BLOOMFIELD

BY DON DeMICHEAL

JAMES POWELL

IT WAS ALWAYS GREAT when Mike Bloomfield and Paul Butterfield would come trooping through the Chicago *Down Beat* office to see Pete Welding, who was sort of their musical kindred spirit-adviser-father confessor. It was great because all the little ladies pecking away at their typewriters would start twittering and tittering, sneaking up to me with snide comments about the length of the two young men's hair, their casual dress (old jeans, jackets), their unscrubbed appearance . . . wild-eyed beatniks they probably are . . . maybe with bombs . . . carrying a guitar . . . ! This, you understand, was about six, seven years ago, some time before long hair, jeans, and unkemptness were common, at least in Chicago's Loop.

Welding kept telling me about these two guys . . . hung up on the blues, sitting in with the south-side blues crowd, Paul living in the ghetto (Mike stayed at his mother's Gold Coast pad), both coming over to Pete's apartment to dig his collection of old blues records. Fascinating. But I had the feeling that this was in some way like other white-youth musical interests, the old thing of Imitation Black, which goes back, I guess, to the Austin High Gang, and if not that far, at least to Lu Watters and those other pale reflections of black beauty. One day, Pete said Mike could really play. I said something like, "Oh?" but didn't believe him, because my mind was made up, without having heard him play one note.

Then Mike and Paul got hooked up with Bob Dylan (like attracts like, I thought); next came some feelers for a tour of England (the British dig ersatz, said I); then the Butterfield Blues Band and the *East Meets West* album and lots of money; Mike split, formed the Electric Flag; next Columbia records, more money, fame, places for both in the pantheon of pop-music idols. Finally I heard them play, and they knocked me flat. DeMicheal's wrong again. Thank God.

Recently, they were back in Chicago, their home town, for a record date with their old mentor, Muddy Waters, and a concert at the Auditorium Theater. Mike, now addressed as Michael, was treated with seven pairs of kid gloves by the record and concert people. Sensitive, temperamental, you know. "He disappears . . . never'll be able to do an interview . . . just smiles at everybody . . ."

A call to his grandmother's apartment, listed in the phone book, produced:

"Mike, you got eyes for an interview?"

"Sure. What's it for?"

"Down Beat."

"Down Beat! Yeah? Where y'wanna do it? Where you at? I'll be right down."

Fifteen minutes later, he was trooping through the labyrinth of offices where I work now (in an old, converted mansion), refusing to let me lead the way to my own office (which was to hell and beyond), playing a game (and winning it, since he found my office), still toting his guitar, still causing little old ladies to stop their menial tasks to cluck tongues (and causing sweet young things to look up, too, but for different reasons, since he looks like a bloody movie star), still wearing an old jacket and jeans, but now . . . a STAR.

Like so many musicians, his speech is much like his playing: long, sometimes involved sentences (lines), clearly stated (as if he's thinking four bars ahead) in often colorful and imaginative ways.

Surprisingly, he began talking about Lester Young and Duke Ellington:

"To my ears, Lester Young is easier to understand than any average Motown recording because it's clear—it's very clear. He takes the melody, the head, and then he does variations on it . . . Ellington, there's no better music in the world. There's no more polished, complex form than the Ellington band, early or late."

In the last two years or so, it seems that Bloomfield and other pop people have been getting closer to jazz, since they've been improvising more, which usually means that whoever is doing the improvising will naturally get into jazz.

At first, he seemed to agree:

"Well, I'll tell you, what I know about jazz and my interest in it was this: I had for years read names like Lester Young and Charlie Parker and Charlie Barnet, not that they were similar, but just all these names. But I'd never heard any of them—I'd just heard names. And Pete Welding turned me on. He said why don't you just start listening to these names—and he played me his record collection, his hundreds and hundreds of records, and he played them chronologically from early to late, and this was six, seven years ago, and he just played me enormous amounts of music and made me listen to it and understand how it developed, and I heard it.

"But that music—if you take a young horn player today like Albert Ayler or Roscoe Mitchell, you can be sure that he in his life is a direct link in a chain that may have started with Lester Young you know, going to Parker, on to Coltrane, to Ornette, to Archie Shepp, to Mitchell—it's a direct link.

But then he disagreed:

"That music is not in my background at all—those changes, those ideas of melodies, the entire jazz musical tradition. I never heard that music except in a scholarly way, as a class of music, to learn it. I picked up some things from it, but very little as opposed to my background, which was the music of AM radio, American media music."

Then it was pointed out to him that he played a thing very much like Charlie Christian; just one little phrase he played. If he were to put a tag on it, it was blues. But it sounded like jazz. What was the difference?

"No difference," he said. "There really isn't. It was improvised music."

"It seems to me, if you're going to improvise, and you're a popular-music musician, you have to go in the direction of jazz—what's going to come out is going to sound more and more like jazz."

"Jazz guitarists... have tried to sound too much like horns . . ."

"No, I don't think so," he replied. "We're getting into semantics. I really don't know what jazz is and what jazz is not. Ramsey Lewis is considered a jazz pianist, and I'm sure he considers himself one, but I don't consider it jazz in any way. I consider him a blues player in the style of Ray Charles. Ray Charles, for all purposes and intents, can play a sort of weak jazz, but he's a superb blues player, a super Gospel player. Now, you take someone like Oscar Peterson or Phineas Newborn—when he's playing blues, it's jazz blues, and it's an entirely different thing. You can hear it, you know. There're musical differences. Jazz uses ninth and 13th chords. But, see, I could improvise without harmonically extending the form, and I feel jazz improvisation harmonically and rhythmically extends. I could improvise for a long time and never change the form of my music. I wouldn't change it harmonically. I wouldn't play dissonance, really; I mean I would play with microtones, but they certainly wouldn't be dissonant to the genre that I was in, and I wouldn't really improvise too much within the time sequence. Yet I could and do sometimes play music that goes radically into different harmonic directions and radically different time directions, and you can say, now you're playing jazz—this is jazz when you're doing this—but to me, I don't think it is, because to play jazz, in my opinion, you've sort of got to be schooled in it and brought up on it, and you've got to know the roots of it, you know?

"Like I said, like the training of those musicians and those horn players, you've got to understand that. . . ."

"But don't you feel that you're in a similar continuum as, say, Roscoe Mitchell?", I asked.

"No, I'm not, no. I've heard Charlie Christian, I've heard . . ."

"I don't mean in jazz."

"In music, yes. Absolutely. In blues, I know I am. I'm a follower of the B.B. King style of modern blues music, and I've taken that style and molded my own style from it. But it certainly isn't jazz, as far as I'm concerned. That music is blues and nothing but. American, if you would, folk blues. Jazz is a folk music, too, but. . . ."

Bloomfield didn't start off to be a blues player. He was a rock-and-roll whiz kid, very fast, with a bagful of tricks. Yet, he said, whenever he heard a blues record on the radio, it got to him. His progression to the blues began in folk music, which led to Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and then to Lightnin' Hopkins, Muddy Waters, and the south side.

"I think I was about 16 when I first started going down on the south side," he recalled. "I was a good guitar player then, you know, fast, and I would take my guitar, and I was ready to burn those cats. I'd play my rock-and-roll licks, and a lot of those guys would be impressed by how fast I played. But, of course, I wasn't playing blues, and I wasn't playing soulfully or anything. It's taken me till now to learn how to play blues like a man."

The way he learned was by doing, playing with blues men, in joints, in front-room parlors, wherever there was something to be learned.

"So many of those people were real nice," he said almost wistfully, but then a frown skittered across his face and: "So many, when they saw me getting good, weren't so nice anymore 'cause they didn't dig me copying their licks."

Which raised a subject that I'm sure has been brought up to him many times before. Does he feel a draft because he's a white man playing blues?

"Well, if I didn't play it better than the black cats that I learned from or as good as them," he answered, "I would really feel it. But since I know I can hold my own chops-wise, playing-wise, I don't really. I feel it in the way that for years white people have made their money covering colored music, just imitating it, and you can always sell the white version of black anything."

"But isn't that still happening?"

"I'm a perfect example of that—you're looking at it—and I try as best as I can at all times to say, 'Hey, man, if you dig me, you've got to listen to these cats.' And where's B.B. King and Albert King now? They're revived and have the best careers they've ever had in their lives. And why? It's because the white cats they taught and who learned from them told where it's at. They didn't say, 'Hey, I invented this music.' They made sure that people knew who they learned from. That's all you could do, you know."

One of the main sources of learning for both Bloomfield and Butterfield was Muddy Waters, who was, according to most accounts today, quite open-minded with his two young white admirers.

"Muddy was amused with us in the beginning, I think," Bloomfield said. "I remember once I got real drunk when I was about 17 years old, at Pepper's, and I was singing up there. I was singing a song I wrote about Muddy, and I remember him cracking up at a table of his cronies. I mean here was this club where there were these pimps and gousters and bad cats and whores—and not only that but all these working people too. Just a man's scene; it was no boy's scene. And these grown men allowed me to be in on that scene and treated me as sort of an equal.

"Muddy and Otis Spann were very fatherly about it in an amused fashion, you know—they'd figure what's with this little white boy down here? And then they'd crack up when they saw he could play. I guess they took a little pride and pleasure in seeing us mature as musicians just as there were guys who got put up tight the better we got to play. They figured, 'Well, this cat's going to get me right out of the gig.' And then there were cats who just didn't care about color; they were mad because you were playing better than them, and some cat would hire you instead of them. This happened with me lots of times. I know it happened with Paul. He played at a place called the Blue Flame, and he was a special attraction."

It's a long way from Pepper's Lounge on Chicago's southside to where Mike Bloomfield is now. Looked up to by a legion of young guitarists, he is a mature musician, concerned that his admirers learn music the right way. His major complaint is that youngsters learn music backwards—they learn certain phrases and string them together, instead of learning their instruments.

"All they do," he said, "is learn chops, licks. That's how I started learning, which is a very bad way to learn. I'd been better off if I'd learned how to play one or two notes correctly, learned how to state my melody in the most simple, articulate way possible. Like you hear a fast run, and you say, 'Gee, look at what that guy played,' and you try right away to learn it. It took me years not to do that—not even want to do that—and to want to take music and put it together in my own way, with my own logic, and then add musicality to it by attack and touch. But it's a long, long process, and it takes you years to go back to fundamentals and learn where you went wrong so many times.

"You must play your music as musically as possible. Every note must be related to another note, not only harmonically, not only logically, not only tone-wise, but in timbre, attack—one note soft, one note a little louder, and it all must make sense within the framework of the genre, the framework of your own playing. I hope that I'm doing that all the time now. I know I'm trying to.

"I guess now I could play any mode that there is if I heard it awhile—any music. To me it's just music. I played with Don Ellis' band and it wasn't complex; I didn't feel any struggles about the time or anything. You just hear it as music and it's quite simple to play.

"Jazz guitarists, in my opinion, have tried to sound too much like horns or have not used the guitar to the extent that a guitar is supposed to be used. The guitar is not a tempered instrument—it can be bent, it can be messed with. A piano you hit, and that's all you can do with it. Where as with the guitar—boy! There are an amazing amount of things to do. And with an electric guitar you can do even more.

"I don't think many jazz people have ever even considered investigating the possibilities of the guitar until just recently, though they are brilliant musicians, especially Django Reinhardt, who of all the jazz guitarists was my favorite. If any jazz guitarist had an influence on me, it was him.

"Why? Because he played sweetly. He had a very, very sweet style, and he had tone and a strong attack. He was a strong, impassioned player. But I found Mundell Lowe, Jim Raney, Jim Hall, and Barney Kessel were finger players. They play with their heads, and they don't play so much with their hearts, like Django, and as opposed to someone like George Van Eps who plays highly emotional music, for my ears at least. George plays guitar like Clare Fisher plays piano . . . real romantically and emotionally. It's not so much an exercise in intellect, even though Van Eps'

/Continued on page 48

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BLOOMFIELD

(Continued from page 16)

playing is truly intellectual, really complex—it's almost classical, you see, playing seven strings and playing voicings like he does. But still it has heart; there's a great deal of soul in his music, which I just found lacking in most of the jazz guitar players. And when they attempted blues . . . well, I found it just appalling."

Vibrato is another thing that Bloomfield said he found few jazz guitar players used. For some reason, with the guitar, one can get a vibrato that sounds just like a human voice, he said, and it can be made to vibrate horizontally or vertically. "You can play it," he said, "like a sitar. You can play it going across instead of down; you can bend notes seven or eight frets and play it that way. Django did it. B.B. did it. And they sound like voices. They sound like singing. They sound like the ultimate instrument, the human voice. They were the ones for me."

If he could gather together 100 young, promising guitarists, what would he tell them?

"I would tell them to try to play as simply as possible," Bloomfield said, "to reassess their musical knowledge to see how much of their music is just mechanized licks, just something they can play with their eyes closed, just involuntary hand usage, and to assess their music on that point—and then clear all that garbage away. Think, if you've got a lick, where can you use it, and break it down into just notes, leading one note into another, see the logic of music, and learn the value of a note.

"These things sound so horribly abstract, but it took me so many years to learn because I did it wrong for so many years. I just learned licks and put them together any old way I could. I finished my one lick, and then my brain would immediately come up with another lick that was there by rote in my mind. After a while, I would be able to alter the licks a little, and this is how I learned. But it's not the right way to learn. You should be hearing the music in your head, what you want to play, a definite musical pattern. Then play it the way you're hearing it.

"To a young guitar player, this will sound like just so much bull, because he'll hear someone playing 500 notes and he only knows 50 notes. And he won't even know that maybe his 50 notes are being better played and more intelligently played than this guy's 500 notes, because 500 notes make no sense at all."

He paused and reflected for a few moments, and then he said:

"Theres' another thing—musicality and taste. Oh, God! I've been playing since I'm 13, and I'm 26 now, and I'm just beginning to learn what attack is, what articulation is, how to give one note four or five different values—with vibrato, without vibrato, with attack, with timbre, and things that are just so important to being very musical, to playing highly musical music. You know, musicality. That's all I think about now." db

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1969 August 7 – Down Beat
"Father and Son: An interview with Muddy Waters and Paul Butterfield" by Don DeMicheal. 3 pages. Also Otis Spann is interviewed.

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1969 October 18 – Rolling Stone – LA Free Press – Melody Maker.
Review of "Fathers and Sons" album.

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1969. Dec. – Hit Parader.
Article on "Fathers and Sons". Review of the concert by Irv Mosrowitz. 3 pages.

Hit Parader Dec. 1969

For a month before it was to occur, there were posters plastered all over Chicago proclaiming:

COSMIC

JOY · SCOUT SUPER · JAM

a benefit concert

The

Phoenix Academy

Featuring

MIKE BLOOMFIELD
PAUL BUTTERFIELD
JAMES COTTON
DUCK DUNN
NICK GRAVENITES
SAM LAY
BUDDY MILES
OTIS SPANN
Members of
QUICKSILVER MESSENGER SERVICE
&
THE ACE OF CUPS

April 24, 1969
Auditorium Theater
Chicago, Illinois

FATHERS AND SONS

WHAT A LINEUP!! From the first sight of those posters, I anticipated a grand night of music at the newly renovated Auditorium Theater, but little did I know what was to happen before the Phoenix Concert.

Two days before the concert, I went to Chess Records to talk to Marshall Chess about a group that I have been working with. As usual, upon entrance to the building, I asked the receptionist, "What's happening?"

To that, she pointed to the above poster, and replied, "They're all upstairs recording."

I was overwhelmed by the thought of all of the famous musicians recording together, and my first instinct was to get into those sessions. I was told that it was top-secret, and that no one was allowed in the sessions. Being persistent, my next move was to ask Marshall Chess, and he gave me the same answer.

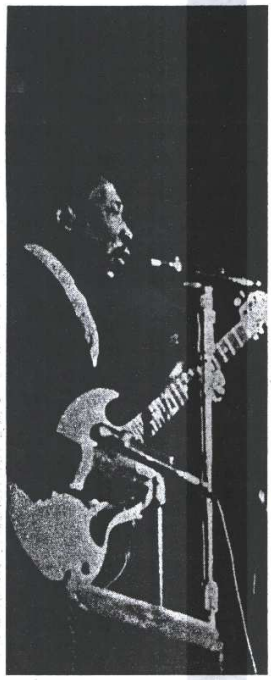
So, that whole night, Tuesday, April 22, 1969, I spent on the phone, looking for people who could get me into the studios through other means. After many hours and calls, I finally hit the right person, who shall remain nameless, I was to be at Chess' Ter-Mar Studios at five o'clock on the following day to see what was going on.

When I arrived at Studio A, I finally saw who was actually recording, and the list of people is something from a blues dreambook: Muddy Waters; Mike Bloomfield; Paul Butterfield; Otis Spann; Duck Dunn' and Sammy Lay. Butterfield, Bloomfield, and Lay, all from Butterfield's original band, were reunited and playing with Waters and Spann, their mentors. Few people were admitted into the studio, and I was very lucky to be there. So, I just sat there, in awe of these men and watched the proceedings.

This was the third night in succession of recording for this super sextet. I asked about the previous sessions and how they were going, and apparently, upon Spann's entrance, the evening before, the group jelled.

The musicians looked happy in anticipation of the night ahead. It began with Butterfield overdubbing a song from the evening before, and then Bloomfield doing the same. When all of the men entered the studio, I was in for a surprise. This was not the super star session that I expected. Instead of Bloomfield or Butterfield or any other coming up front, it was a singular musical unit. Basically, it was Muddy Waters with a backup group, probably the best blues backup group that could be put together.

The beer was out and the lights were dimmed in this atmosphere of warmth and friendship. By 8:45, it was rolling, and what I heard was the blues. Some of Muddy's old songs were revived by this new band, and on tape were "Mean Desperation," "Sad Letter," "I'm Ready," and "Walkin' In The Park." These men played the music expertly, needing only



MUDDY WATERS

PAUL BUTTERFIELD

BUDDY MILES

a few takes for each song. It was really something to see.

The intensity that Butterfield shows onstage is also present in the studio. He puts his whole body and soul into it. Bloomfield played his subtle guitar figures around Muddy's rhythm guitar, and was so tasteful. Spann's piano weaved through all the music beautifully while Sammy Lay solidly backed them with finesse and strength. Duck Dunn, (Booker T and the MG's and Stax-Bolt bassist) was a new person amidst, all of these old friends, Obviously he was also in awe of the people he was working with. With tight blues lines, his consistency added much to the music. This three-day old group was really together.

After all of the recording was done some people made comments:

Marshall Chess - "The best blues cut in ten years."

Nick Gravenites - "It's good to hear the blues again."

Sam Lay - "The only time I ever actually felt the blues." However, not all of the feelings were verbalized. There were looks of satisfaction on everyone's faces, both the musicians and spectators. All listened to the playback with amazement, and rightfully so. The people depart, the studio is empty, except for used beer cans, filled ashtrays, and the ringing of music.

Thursday night was the Phoenix Concert, and I wondered if it could be as good as the night before. Nick Gravenites, the evening's emcee, introduced The Ace Of Cups to start the music along its way. They are an all - girl rock band, heavily flavored in folk-inspired lyrics and melodies. They were fun to watch but not too good to listen to. Next on the bill were Gravenites and what's left of Quicksilver Messenger Service. Recently, Gary Duncan split from the group for newer pastures, thus leaving John Cipollina, Davis Freiberg, and Greg Elmore with the pieces. Gravenites' vocals were pretty strong and his writing is quite good. Up to this point in the concert, however, the most exciting thing that happened was a large section of the speaker system falling into the vacant orchestra pit.

Twenty-eight hundred people showed up to see music, and now it was to begin. A quartet of musicians came on to the stage: Butterfield; Bloomfield; Dunn: and Buddy Miles on drums. "Hey, Little School Girl" was their first song, and Bloomfield had the vocal which he performed only adequately. He makes it up, though, with a very nice instrumental. Then Butterfield takes "Losin' Hand" and sings with both his voice and his harp. The vocal trading is kept up with Miles taking the lead on "Down On Broadway" and "Texas." Miles is more impressive when he is jamming with outside musicians.

Exit Miles, enter Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Sam Lay, and Ira Kamin (on organ). The tapes are rolling again, only this time with one of the most receptive audiences I have ever seen. The

DUCK DUNN

MIKE BLOOMFIELD

OTIS SPANN

crowd expected great music, and they only had had a taste of it from the previous foursome. Now, just about everybody onstage was a dynamo, so the audience's expectations were unbelievably high.

The new group, with Muddy singing all of the vocals, began with "Hoochie Coochie Man," and it was the first sign of a musical explosion. Bloomfield and Butterfield were grooving on each other's music, with fine counterpoint and anticipation. They were working so beautifully, it made me wonder why they ever broke up. As usual, Lay and Dunn provided a solid rhythm section while Spann and Kamin could hardly be noticed.

The slow blues was next with "Long Distance Call" a mournful song that gave way to both Butterfield's and Bloomfield's instrumental virtuosity. Muddy was also different on this night. He was more fluid in his singing and his physical movements and was generally very relaxed.

There were a couple of more songs, and then what we all had been waiting for happened. Muddy and the band went into "Got My Mojo Working," and then everyone saw that there was only one boss on the stage -- Muddy Waters. He took hold and the audience went right with him. When he sang the words, "Got my mojo working," the audience, in unison, answered, "Got my mojo working." It was incredible. The refined atmosphere of the Auditorium became a gospel revival hall with Muddy being the preacher and all of the audience his followers. It ended, but the audience wouldn't let go.

Muddy came back to the podium and Buddy Miles joined the band, and they went into a faster "Mojo." By now, there was not a single person who could sit in his chair, and all were jumping and applauding and singing. Moved by this response, Muddy even did a dance on the stage. It was the most exciting performance that I had ever seen, and when he left the stage for good, the audience still wanted more. Everything that followed was after the fact.

All of the "Mojo," was put on tape, and recently, I was lucky enough to hear a rough mix of it. It is the most exciting live performance that I have ever heard on tape, and hopefully it will be included in the album that is being put together. All of the electricity of the Auditorium is transferred on the tape, and it put me right back to the Auditorium with all of those good people on that beautiful evening.

Between the studio work and the concert work, there is a wealth of music that will be in record form soon, possibly as a two-album set. The name of the album is going to be called *Fathers and Sons*. It was a musical happening that will probably never occur again. I'm looking forward to the LP, but in the meantime, I will have the memory of watching it all.□irv mosrowitz

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1971 June – Guitar Player.
Article: Michael Bloomfield: “straight stone city blues”. 7 pages.

Michael Bloomfield
"straight stone city blues"

by Michael Brooks

Driving north on California's U.S. 101, thoughts of what Michael Bloomfield, the once-controversial white black-blues guitarist from the Butterfield, Electric Flag and *Supersession* experience, would be like brought on unlimited speculation. A few minutes after crossing San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, I turned off the freeway on an exit marked Mill Valley, leading to a small, secluded community which moves to the beat of the nearby metropolitan area. I wondered if the town had looked the same when Bloomers first brought the Electric Flag here to create their sound, providing the roots for such groups as Blood, Sweat & Tears and Chicago.

Waiting only minutes in front of his humble Mill Valley home, I spotted an electric curly-haired young man walking down the sidewalk with a friend at each side. After a few brief "hello, and how are you's," we went inside and the interview began. Because this interview turned out to be so informative, we will first present part one; the second will follow in the next issue of Guitar Player.

* * * * *

GP: When and where was the first time you picked up a guitar?

MB: I started playing guitar when I was 13 years old and I had a guitar teacher for about a year and a half. He taught me chords and theory, what little I know, and also some lead and stuff. Mostly what I would do was toward the end of the lessons, I would just learn the chords. He had a "Fake Book," with all the famous standards. They have the chord changes and the melody. I would play the chords to tunes from the book and he would play the lead to it and I would like him to improvise. And I learned how to play rhythm guitar.

GP: What kind of music were you into then, outside the lessons?

MB: I was into 50's rock and roll, AM type. Carl Perkins and Sun records music, Chuck Berry and whatever was on the dial. And just very, very rarely would I hear blues or black music. But way at the end of the radio dial in Chicago was a show called "Jam With Sam" that I heard when I was around 14 years old, that station played stone blues, man. That was around the same time as the lessons and most naturally I just liked that music most of all. And then, when I was still 14, I went down with a friend of mine to hear Muddy Waters and we took a bus, a train then another train to the club. Two little kids goin' down there to a funky bar and they wouldn't let us in. So we just stood outside and listened. And, at the same time, I was really interested in folk music, but real commercial folk music like Odetta and Bob Gibson and Josh White. But as I got older, I got real interested in more ethnic type folk music. I call it ethnic music, but if it were like blues, I would prefer Lightnin' Hopkins to Brownie McGee, because he seemed more real. He wouldn't be playing clubs, he would be in Houston playing, you know. Now, it's all mixed together, but then it was polarized into definite categories.

GP: What about your guitar playing?

MB: As far as guitar playing, I was just a regular hot-licks kid, I wanted to learn. Like, if you wanted to play in a rock and roll band at that time, I was 14 then and I'm 27 now, you had to know that the ideal guitar player was the guy who was not inventive, but the guy who could play just like Duane Eddy or just like Chuck Berry or just like the rockin' R and R's or the Virtues or the Ventures or anything like that, or Buddy Holly. It was the guy who could copy every guitar solo exactly from the record, note for note just perfect. And so that's what I tried to do. At the same time, though, I was hearing that stuff on the blues radio station, I was trying to throw as much of that stuff in my playing as I could. And so, by the time I was 15, I was a real fast, bluesy, rock and roll guitar player, but I was playing anything. I had all the notes, but I wasn't putting them in the right places at all. It took many years later for that to develop.

GP: So what was your theory of music at that time?

MB: Well, my theory of music was to imitate as exactly as you can and you'll be doing all right. That lasted for quite a while until I learned some good musical values.

GP: Then where'd you go from the blues-rock thing?

MB: When I was around 14 or 15, I stopped playing electric and started playing acoustic.

GP: You started with electric?

MB: No, I started with an acoustic, f-hole type dance band guitar, and then I went to electric and played as many rock and roll lounges and gigs as I could when I was around 15. And then I got me a Martin and I started learning folk music. I started playing as much of that as I could. At that time I was really interested in playing ethnic folk music, bluegrass, and Travis picking.

GP: With fingerpicks?

MB: With them and without them. By the time I was 18 I was about as good at that as anyone in the world has ever been, I mean I was a mean picker at that time. I can still play that way pretty well, I call it now, piano guitar, playing guitar like a piano . . .

GP: . . . honky tonk type?

MB: Exactly. Ragtime. And all the cats that were really great at that time, Gary Davis and Johnny Horton and all those cats, I was hearing them back when I was 15 and 16. I would get their tapes or their records somewhere. There were certain magazines that catered to this type of musical taste. There was this magazine called the "Little Sandy Review" out of Minneapolis that had very, very good taste in music and I followed it quite well, tried to get hold of records it recommended. By that time, for all practical purposes, I had put the electric guitar down and was playing nothing but acoustic folk music. And then when I was around 18 years old, I quit playing guitar and started managing a club, the Fickled Pickle, and putting on blues concerts, hiring many of the guys that I had read about when I was 15. Digging them up in Chicago, searching through the ghetto, searching through the slums trying to find those guys.

GP: I had heard that you hired Muddy Waters one night.

MB: Muddy was easy to get, I had some really famous, obscure guys like Koko Moro, Washboard Sam, Jazz Gillum, Sunny Boy Williamson, Little Brother Montgomery, and Tommy McLendon.

GP: Did you ever get Furry Lewis or B. Sam Firk . . .

MB: Well, we couldn't get them 'cause we couldn't get the money to pay their way from Memphis. But a friend of mine from Memphis, Charley Musselwhite, who is just my great friend, was doing the same thing in Memphis, only he wasn't getting the bookins, you see, he was just hanging out with all those guys like Gus Cannon, WillShade, Furry Lewis, and this guy Willy Borem, they call him Memphis Willy B., Charles was hanging out with all those guys at that time. The same thing I was doing in Chicago, he was doing in Memphis.

Michael Brooks

GP: Were those blues people hard to hunt up?

MB: No. Well, in Chicago, you see during World War II and right after, there was this big record company called Bluebird Records, a subsidiary of RCA, run by a guy named Lester Melrose. They employed many of the most famous blues singers, really steadily, just like Motown would employ steady bands, like their house bands. They had a song called "Mama Don't 'llow" that was credited to this guy Washboard Sam. His name was affixed to that even though it was done years before that by hillbilly bands. But he got a copyright out of it from this guy Melrose, who

copyrighted "Key To The Highway" and all these old songs and made sure the artists didn't get screwed. He had a great love for the blues, Melrose. So I found a few of these guys who were still around gigging like Sunnyland Slim. Sunnyland knew where everybody was and through him and Big Joe Williams, who was also with Bluebird, I managed to find everybody I was looking for. Some of them were very hard to find, like Coco Arnold who had kept out of the public eye since 1935. He was just on retirement, doing nothing at all, living in a little old one-room shanty. A lot of the guys were suspicious: why would a young white boy be wanting to know about them, much less wanting to hear them or know anything about their music? Many of them were oddly amazed that you would know anything about their past history and whatnot. But I told them there were people that wanted to hear them and who knew all about them. And like some of them just wouldn't believe it

GP: Like when these guys came to your club, would you gig with them on stage?

MB: We didn't even play on stage. It was at their homes. On stage at that time, there were younger singers in Chicago, most of them patterned after the old blues people. If it was a harmonica player, he would be patterned after Little Walter; if it was a guitar player, he would be patterned after B. B.; and there were tons of them, they were older than I was, but only by about three or four years. There were guys like Little Smokey Smothers, Homesick James, Eddy King, and Hound Dog Taylor, and Robert King, Lefty Diz and Fenton Robinson, and let's see, Luther Allison, he's comin' on strong now. Of course, the big ones, Buddy Guy and Otis Rush and Magic Sam and all those guys were in Chicago and they were easy to find, because they would be giggin' in club. Guitar Junior, B. B. Junior and Little Mac and all these cats, they'd all be playing clubs. But to find these guys who had stopped recording 20 years ago was tough. What interested me even more was, of course, the guys, because it was years prior to that time that I had been an electric rock and roll guitar player and like I still have my best chops playing fast rock and roll guitar.

GP: A few years back you used to have lightning speed, but the accuracy was off.

MB: I did have speed but I didn't have the notes in the right places. It took me all these years to develop. But speed isn't important. I think it's good to have both, speed and feeling. Listen to Django and Charlie Christian and you'll hear feeling and speed. Sometimes, at rare moments you'll hear B. B. King play as fast as the fastest jazz guitarist. He can do it if he wants to. You see, B. B. is weird, he usually plays only down strokes just like Charlie Christian only played down strokes. But B. B. can play both up and down strokes and he plays just as fast as the fastest jazz guitarist in the world. But he's learned from Django records and stuff like that.

GP: When you say "feeling" I assume you mean feeling the vocal sounds of not only your voice but also your guitar.

MB: Yeah. It took me a long time to get interested in singing, not *me* singing but listening to vocal sounds, because the finest guitarists are those that imitate voices. And the more vocally you can play guitar, the more human you're going to sound.

GP: Kind of like Robert Johnson wailing right along with his guitar?

MB: Right, exactly.

GP: And when you stop singing, your guitar continues singing . . .

MB: Right. You know, Jimi Hendrix was very good at that. Very, very good at that. I consider him the greatest guitar innovator of the decade at least, possibly this quarter of a century. Charlie Christian and then Hendrix as an innovator, as someone who completely changed the whole way of thinking and looking at a guitar. As far as electric playing, he was the first real electric guitarist for me, other than the old guys who played like the original steel players. Like Leon McAuliffe, there's one of the real electric guitar innovators in America. And one of the originals. He was supposed to be one of the first guys to play the electric guitar, this was way back in the early depression, in the early thirties, and he played so sophisticated. Les Paul was like the first one to get into overdubbing, but McAuliffe was a very sophisticated player. He played with Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. But this guy's playing was really far out. I heard his first solo and if you played it today, it would be avant garde, he was such a heavy player.

GP: How did the blues thing come about for you after listening to all those R & R records?

MB: Because I had heard it on the radio and I liked it a whole lot more than Rock and Roll. Now, my tastes have changed, I like rock and blues equally. I will sit and listen to both B. B. and Fats Domino, they both mean a lot to me. But the blues then was so unattainable, and so delightful to my ears I wanted it pretty badly, so I just drenched myself in it. Instead of playing it, I would just listen to these cats. I would hire them and then listen to them. I would be their friend and they could show me things, and I could get them money. And I would learn from Big Joe (Williams) and Sleepy John (Estes), you know, the old Delta blues singers and they would be teaching me stuff just like they taught Robert Johnson when he was little. The exact same way. It was incredible. At the same time, going from club to club seeing the modern ones playing just what I wanted to play, that was where I was at more than anything. Like I prefer "Rumble" by Lee Gray to maybe something by Duane Eddy, just because it was funkier. I always lean toward the funkier sound.

GP: How did the Paul Butterfield thing come about?

MB: Well, like I had my own band when I was around 18 or 19. I got married and still worked in clubs. I started playing at this place called Big John's, playing piano behind Big Joe Williams, with Charlie Musselwhite playing harp, and a washboard player. We played that thing out for six months. And then Joe went on the road and I started playing guitar. Occasionally other guys would come in and sing and play guitar. So there was two guitars and a drum. He didn't have a drum set, just a drum, and then a harmonica. And then we played like that for a while and then finally the drummer got a set. He was a drummer from the Sopwith Camel, a guy named Norm Mayall. And then finally we got a bass player, he was from the Roy Rogers' show, the Roy Rogers' traveling hillbilly show; his name was Sid Warner and we played straight blues.

GP: Do you remember some of the things you were doing at that time?

MB: "I Got Fooled," "Sweet Sixteen," "Five Long Years," "Stand Around Cryin'," "Country Boy Don't Say You Don't Love Me 'Cause I'm Staying Out All Night," and stuff like that. A couple of Elmore James' numbers and just blues.

GP: But, I mean it wasn't like Mississippi John Hurt type blues music, like "Candy Man," it was pretty much city blues?

MB: Yeah, it was absolutely straight stone city blues. It was like if Muddy Waters had a Buddy Guy-ish type guitarist in his band. That's what our music

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was like. And anyway, we played for a long time in this place, Big John's, and then I got signed to Columbia when I was 19 to record an album with this band, but they never issued it. I would love to hear it.

GP: Does Columbia still have that album?

MB: Yeah, I'm sure they do, but they never issued it, you know. Then, we recorded "Goin' Down Slow" and some original tunes and some other stuff. And then I would also work on the south side (Chicago), just as a guitar player hired out to other people's bands. I would work with them and I would also jam with the older musicians, in the older style. Not so much like John Hurt, but more like Tam Peret. Like there were so many piano and guitar player teams like Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell, and I would play in that vein. I would play that style. I have always considered it important to play in the genre of the style of music that you are playing. As they called it themselves, they called it "complementing guitar." But the band we had was pretty young and enthusiastic. I've just heard one cut off that unreleased album: the playing was great and the singing was terrible.

GP: What kind of guitar were you using at that time?

MB: I was playing a three-quarter size Fender that I bought at a pawn shop. Cost me about $23.00. It was rotten, but it did me fine. I have really small hands anyway. I had always wanted a Telecaster, but I didn't get one until I started playing with Paul.

GP: Yeah, back to Butterfield, you were on one side of town and he was on the other, right?

MB: I was playing on the north side with a blues band, Paul was with an all black blues band on the south side. He would come in and sing with me in Big John's which was in this kind of Haight/Ashbury of Chicago at the time. Then I had a chance to go to this other club which was farther up north and had more bread, so I asked Paul if he wanted to take my gig. I always hated his guts and he hated mine. He got a really good band together and when they hit they were like dynamite and it was the best band I had ever seen at that time. And so we both played in our respective clubs for a little under a year and then a guy from Elektra records asked Paul if he wanted to make a record and Paul asked me if I wanted to play a little slide for him. I admired Paul incredibly for his singing and his music but I never liked him, so I was kind of reluctant to do it. And finally I said all right, so he took me down and I recorded a whole bunch of stuff in New York. I played piano. I didn't play guitar because Elvin (Bishop) was their guitar player, but I did play slide on two or three numbers.

GP: Just out of curiosity, what did you use for your slide?

MB: I used a bicycle handlebar, cut off about an inch. I find that sounds the best. Anyway, after that thing I returned to Chicago. Then Dylan called me.

GP: Did you know him before he called you?

MB: Yeah. He had played in this club in Chicago and I had heard his first album and thought it was shit. I told him that and he said, "I'm not a guitar player man, I'm a poet." And so we sat and talked and played all day and goofed around and got to be friends. And then he left and I hadn't seen him until he called me up and asked if I would play on a record with him. Now, I had no idea that he was famous at this time, that he was sort of a superstar all unto his own. And when I got to Woodstock and saw this mansion that his manager owned – like I really didn't know what was happening. I learned "Like A Rollin' Stone" and a few others and then we cut that album *Highway 61* or whatever it's called, and after that we played at Newport and by that time I started playing lead with Paul. I went back to Chicago after we had cut that record, and I wound up playing guitar in a go-go club and Paul came in and heard me and decided he wanted me in his band. I told him that if I was going to play in his band I was going to have to play lead guitar, and that I was not going to play piano. He said all right and so we started playing and that first gig, I think Oscar Brown Jr. got us. We did some benefits and then we got a microbus and started traveling all over the country playing one-nighters. That bus was really uncomfortable and I remember one night in Boston, I split the gig saying that bus was dehuman. All this time I was getting better and better in my playing. I took one of those cram courses in jazz from this guy named Pete Welding who used to be the associate editor of Down Beat. He played me all the jazz I had ever wanted to know in my life. He gave me a chronological history of jazz in a short period of time. I understood how you could get from a Coleman Hawkins to a Ben Webster to a Charlie Parker to a Coltrane to an Ornette Coleman to an Albert Ayler and Archie Shepp. I could understand the musical line, you know, like who was playing like who and how it went. And at that time I was very much into Ornette Coleman and I was very interested in his music. And through Mark Naftlin, a piano player, I learned different ways of playing chords. How a minor chord could become a minor ninth chord.

GP: You mean just straight chord fingering?

MB: Right, but I would learn more than that. Like I learned if you were in the key of Fm you would also play in the key of Abmaj.7. You would still be in the same key but you would be playing a minor ninth scale, which would be a different mode. In modes, you can be in like three or four keys at one time. Like the song could be in Fm and you could play in four keys and all of them would be relevant and germane. Well anyway, this was a whole other side to my musical goal at that time which was basically to be a good blues player.

GP: You play mostly by ear?

MB: All by ear. And like this door opened up to me and like I could play so much more by ear. So much more than just blues, I could play just any mode or any framework I would try to fit myself into. And the speed, being a fast guitar player really helped a lot. I've heard tapes of some Butterfield live gigs, where I've played so fast I just couldn't believe it. But now I'm really fast, but not like Alvin Lee. Not that kind of fast, but fast like Johnny Smith, fast like Joe Pass – that kind of fast. Smooth and accurate. So I have these two musical concepts going in my mind; purest blues concept and this sort of unpure, anything-goes-as-long-as-it's-harmonically-germane-and-harmonically-intelligent style of guitar playing. And I was working hard on both of them.

GP: What about the Butter-band?

MB: Well, Butterband at first was very idiomatic and we played just stone blues about as pure as you can play it. As pure as the English when they had their traditional movement and they started playing dixieland, and they really tried to play it pure. Well, I think we passed the color line. I mean we played that blues good, man. There wasn't a blues player that we learned from like Muddy and those cats who didn't say to us, you boys are going to carry it on for us. Except about our voices, when he said, "You're not man enough to sing it yet." Muddy would always say that, and he was right too. But eventually Paul will be man enough, maybe he is now, but we were much younger then. We were really there, we could play any black club if we were familiar with that blues and it would be the same as if Muddy Waters was there. We had that much of the emotional feeling or nuance of that music. There are so many nuances. That is the kind of music in which you respond to it as it happens, not when it's done. Like that's the European western music culture, where you respond to the music when it's done (clap, clap). Like in the Indian culture, when it's happening you nod, and in the black culture you scream, you holler, you approbate, you say, "Yes! WOW! It's Happening!" If a guy gets a tough lick, you scream, "Yeah!" And we were used

to playing to that sort of reaction. Not to applause or standing ovations afterwards, but people responding as it happens. And this correspondence, this close closeness with the audience, this feedback was really necessary. I don't get any response from any club or concert hall today. It's just a bunch of stoned kids lying on the floor. They can appreciate all they want, but they're not from an oral tradition, a feedback tradition. They may scream when they hear a wild note, but they probably learned that from listening to one of B. B. King's live albums.

GP: It's kind of like having the audience in your fingers and you're just going right along with it . . .

MB: . . . and they egg you on and you egg them on. You'll find this same thing with hillbilly music. If you hear a real good bluegrass show, you'll find the same thing. When the band starts a song, the audience will start screaming, man, 'cause they know what it means. There's a whole realm of nuance that means everything to those people. The same thing with the blues.

GP: Without it, it kind of seems like you are playing in a dry cleaner's.

MB: Exactly. You must have that recognition of that style and have the proper response. Like in church, if you don't have that proper response it makes the music a little less valid, you know.

GP: Getting back into it, you dropped the Butterfield band and then split out west and then the Electric Flag.

MB: You know, for a long time all of us in Paul's band had wanted horns. All of our blues records, or many of them, other than Chicago stuff and stuff that came out of the South and Detroit, had horns. Fats Domino, Ray Charles and B. B. King especially were guys that had horns in their bands. And as a guitar player, I really wanted to hear that sound of the guitar interacting with horns. So when I went out to form the Flag, man, that was still in the back of my mind. I wanted just a good old blues band with horns in it. And just all these diverse influences came into the Flag and by that time I was into all kinds of music – Beatles and other things on the radio. There wasn't any music AM or FM that wasn't entering my head at one time or another leaving some sort of imprint on my mind.

GP: Were you satisfied with the Flag?

MB: Well, you know the Flag was a good band, but it got incredibly pushed into the making. Real-fast-to-make-it-real-big syndrome. And we never had time to mature as a band, dialectically, or even as people. The thing that made us close together was our obligation: we had to make this, we had to make that, we had to write this.

GP: What about the cuts, though, weren't you satisfied with tunes like "Texas"?

MB: Yeah, I guess I was. If you want to really hear the Flag's playing in different bags, get *The Trip* album, because we tried to play every style we could think of, every American musical style that we were all familiar with, we played on that. It's the soundtrack from the movie, "The Trip." We played everything: old jazz, dixieland. There's just nothing we don't play on that album. But anyway, by the time the Flag was really getting it together, I was really into this concept of idolatry, not liking idolatry. Like I am super curious to read the "Rolling Stone" to hear the latest news about John Lennon or what Bob Dylan's doing. When I was a kid I was super interested in knowing what Chuck Berry was like or Carl Perkins or anything like that, and I still am. I'm a gossip, I shoot the shit about any of those things.

GP: Let's go back to the Electric Flag, where did you meet Harvey Brooks?

MB: On the Dylan sessions. When I saw him in the band, I really didn't think he was the best bass player I knew, I knew better bass players, but he really wanted to do it and I was flattered that he wanted to and I sort of knew that he was kind of famous as a bass player. But I knew better cats, but he was good. Harvey was real good. He knew nothing about blues, man, his roots were so far removed from mine. Like when I was playing some blues cuts for an Ian and Sylvia session, like he didn't even know how to play blues bass, really, and I kind of resented it. It was childish I guess, but we finally got along, you know. Now, he's just a fabulously great bass player. And I met Buddy Miles in a big rock and roll show. He was playing with Wilson Pickett's band and I was playing in a Mitch Rider session and Mitch was on the show and I asked Buddy would he join the band. And Goldberg I had known for a long time back in Chicago. The horn players, one of them was a friend of Barry, and the other was recommended to me by Larry Coryell. And so that's how we all got together. I got a house out here in Mill Valley and we all came here. We all lived

in the same house, except we should have lived here a lot longer. We should have stayed in one place for a long, long time, man, until every possible thing was ironed out.

GP: It seemed to me that the Flag was really together.

MB: You don't know the half of it. No, we were really good a lot of times live, but a lot of times, well, we just had troubles. Buddy was success crazy, he was absolutely insane to make as much money as he could as fast as he could and he would spend incredibly exorbitant amounts of money and buy giant cars. And we had some junkies in the band. There were just horribly diverse factions which can break any band up. And most of all I found myself being a product, just a stone product. And if I had just a little more control it wouldn't have been so bad. I don't mind being the product if I can also be the manufacturer. If somebody had taken control of the group, we would be together now. We'd have been even more beautiful.

GP: What about Richie Havens? I saw his name on that album playing sitar?

MB: He's just a friend of mine. He's a sweet, sweet, wonderful guy. He's one of the few Christians you'll ever meet. He's truly good. And I just wanted one note, so he played a single note drone on the sitar. He was hanging around the studio when we were recording, so I asked him to play that one note. Just 'cause he was my friend and he was hanging around, I thought why shouldn't he make a little money too. It seems silly to hire a professional sitar player to play one note.

GP: How did that *Supersession* album with Kooper and Steve Stills come about?

MB: I didn't want to make that record too much. It was just a favor for Al Kooper and he said we'll make a lot of bread out of it and subsequently he was absolutely right. It made a million. I had just finished with the Flag and was really depressed, and I didn't want to play any gigs at all. Nothing. All I wanted to do is sit around and read. And I have insomnia, and I told Kooper that and said I probably won't be able to cut this record. He said, well, come on down and give it a try. So I flew to Los Angeles and cut for him all day and he rented this big fancy house with a swimming pool and everything, and I couldn't go to sleep, man, I was so uptight. So I snuck out early in the wee hours of the morning with a guitar in my hand. I got a cab and flew home. And when Al went to look for me in the morning I was already back in San Francisco. So he hired Stills to replace me for that day. And that's how that went. Stills is playing the wah-wah and I'm playing the straight guitar. That's how you can tell who is who. I don't like to rap about weaknesses, but that is something I'm weak in. I am also very reluctant to gig live. I don't dig gigging live. It's not a question of intellectually digging it or not, I just don't react to it well. I get real nervous and real uncomfortable and I never feel that it is really worth it other than to make the bread. I don't get feedback from other people. The only time it's worth it is like when we played San Bernardino with some of the guys from the Johnny Otis Show: Fillmore Evans, the singer, and Eddy Vincent and Big Joe Turner and the horn section and everybody got turned on and it was just fabulous. The audience was turned on too, but they couldn't have been as turned on as we were. All of us, old guys and young guys were just groovin' on each other and having a ball. And like when we played the Keystone Korner (a small club in San Francisco), Friday night was just "agh," but Saturday night everybody was just so turned on, man, it just made everything worth it.■

(In the August issue, Michael Bloomfield will talk about his instrumentation, musical goals, his new album, equipment, technique and more.)

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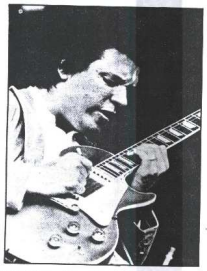
Article: "straight stone city blues Part II". MB talks about his instrumentation, musical goals, his new album, equipment, technique and more. 5 pages.



'Straight Stone City Blues' Part II

Michael Bloomfield

by Michael Brooks

Late last March, I spent a day with Michael Bloomfield in his Mill Valley, California home. Out of that meeting came an interview with enough information for a two-part series. The first, published in June, concerned Michael and his times with Paul Butterfield, Bob Dylan, Steve Stills, the Electric Flag, and his earlier days in Chicago. This, the concluding part of the series, places emphasis on Bloomfield's instrumentation, musical goals and technique.

GP: Musically, what is your ultimate aim in life?

MB: Well, I just want to be a singer, piano player, and guitar player who's able to play in any mode, any mode of music, be it a Bach concerto, whatever. I want to be able to understand what's happening as soon as I hear it. Understand the structure, learn the ideas, and be able to play it. Or, if not play it exactly, play so closely with it that you would think that I know the music. And that's what I want to do. It comes from just knowing that all music is in modes, in different kinds of modes. And pretty soon you get to identify them. You can learn them all technically. There are huge books written on scales and modes.

GP: What instrument are you using now?

MB: A Les Paul and a Gibson double cutaway (an original Les Paul, and an SG).

GP: What kind of strings?

MB: I usually use Fender strings (Rock and Roll). Light gauge for when I'm on a gig and heavy when I'm in the studio.

GP: Any particular reason for heavy gauge in the studio?

MB: Yeah, you don't go out of tune as easily with heavy strings. That's the only reason.

GP: What about the action?

MB: I like it high. I like a guitar to give me pull. I like something to pull against. So I like strings that aren't too loose and I like action that's not loose either. I don't like Slinky strings and I don't like very low action. I want to feel something tactile that I can play against, so I like hard action.

GP: What kind of picks do you like?

MB: I use an imitation tortoise shell pick. You know, they come in those little blue plastic boxes. They're shaped like a real expensive tortoise shell but they're cheap. I like them a lot because they seem to be the most medium pick in the world. They're more medium than any kind of pick that says, like, Fender medium or anything. They're thicker than those, but they're sort of light too.

GP: And amps?

MB: For amplifiers, I like a Fender Super Reverb. I've got a real old Fender Bassman or Showman. I like that and I like an Acoustic amp for big gigs. They're a good amplifier.

GP: Do you plug those in series or just use a single amp at a time?

MB: When I used to play with lots of volume, I plugged in series. Now, I like one amp. If I were able, I would play as quietly as I could. I'll tell you something, man, you can get more volume out of your hands, as a guitar player, than a volume control. I can put my guitar on 4 and get more volume than people on 10 sometimes. Everybody in the bands that I played with complained that I played too loud and I probably do play too loud, but I know my amp is never up past 5. It's all in dynamics, you know. Like, if you turn my amp up to 5 and if I hit it hard, man, it's going to come out so loud. But the whole idea is that even if you turn your amp up to 10, you should still be able to play a whisper and yet have a very loud amplifier. Nuance is extremely important. Or use the volume control on your guitar, you know. Use those things for nuance. Unless you can pick with nuance. I mean, like, look at a horn player: not only can he play soft and loud, but he can put a rasp on his horn. A fuzz tone is never going to equal the naturalness of a rasp like Ray Charles' voice or a horn player when he starts playing raspy. But you must learn at least the dynamics of being able to play very fast and lightly. A lot of people can't play fast unless they're playing real hard. And you should be able to bend notes and sustain them for a long time at the lowest volume possible. Now, I can hold out a note so you would think I am using a sustain unit or feedback, but it doesn't have anything to do with volume, it's just absolutely equal vibrato pressure with your hands almost setting up sympathetic vibrations with the other strings. It's just really important to learn to control your hands.

GP: What did you do to learn this?

MB: Well, there were certain things I had to learn. Like if you are going to bend strings, if you're going to play micro-tonally – that means across the fingerboard vertically instead of up and down. First of all, you've got to learn where your intervals are, right? You've got to learn where your notes are. Like if you are going to bend a note from G to A, which is a whole step, like between G and A there are an infinite number of tones that are called micro-tones. That's the way a sitar player works. Well, you've got to hear that in your head first of all and then you've got to make your hands go automatically to that spot. And there're tricks you learn, like if you're bending your B string and pushing it forward, it's good to mute the string right next to it, the G string. It's good to mute that G and push it up so you can bend your B string right underneath that string. Like sometimes I bend seven or eight frets

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Ellington's band. He is known for his incredible barnyard sounds. You know, like a growl trumpet sound. He could even sound like an animal, and that's how I would like to play.

GP: What about as a total musician?

MB: Ideally, as a musician, I would like to be like Ornette Coleman or like Roland Kirk. I would just like to play melody, just endless streams of melody and have it have no name, no compartment. I would just get up there and play endless streams of melody encompassing every sort of tradition that my ears have come upon. But in another sense, I am a definite purist and I believe that if everybody is playing polkas, and I'm not playing polkas, then I'm not playing along with the group. I was brought up in a tradition of music, the tradition where one complemented and stayed within the genre. Very much like Indian musicians. They stay within that genre, and I think very much that way too. In studio work, you've just got to play with the guy. He tells you to play that way. And so it's best to know every little bit of that whole field. When I play that rhythm and blues, I don't even think of it as blues. There's a whole style of black guitar playing that has nothing to do with the blues. There's a rhythm and blues style, you know. Like Steve Cropper, he's a hillbilly, a white guy, but black guys like Eric Gale and Curtis Mayfield and Bobby Wommack, they play this whole exquisite style of guitar playing that has nothing to do with the blues at all. Bobby Wommack is basically into ballads, street ballads of the 1950's. It really came out of a gospel style of guitar. The kind of playing that came out of gospel guitar was very bluesy, but it wasn't blues, really. It had the same notes as the blues, and the gospel singers would sing the same notes as the blues singers, but it was played a slightly different way. They used more chords, and they used more thirds and things that just weren't used in the blues. Loman Pauling was one of the first guitar players to play that way. Wommack is one of the big exponents of that. Probably one of the best stylists is Eric Gale. The way they play on all the Motown records. Steve Cropper is a very good R & B guitarist, but Gale is just the very best I have ever heard. Those guys all play jazz, but for a jazz guitarist, I like the guys who aren't so heavy. Jimmy Raney is a heavy guitar player, you know, but it just doesn't quite knock me out. I like Django Reinhardt very much. I like Wes Montgomery very much. I like Luiz Bonfa and George Van Eps very much too. For funky Jazz guitar, I like Grant Green and George Benson. I sort of like Phil Upchurch. There's a guy named Sonny Greenwich, from Canada, he's a phenomenon. They talk about John McLaughlin, but dig this Sonny cat, he's the Coltrane of guitar players. But still as great as all these guitarists are, outside of Van Eps, I think that Hendrix is possibly the most innovative guitar player of this decade, or the last twenty years.

GP: Yeah. Jimi didn't have any borders and that's possibly what made him great. When he played I'm sure his thought process didn't say I am playing rock and now I am going into jazz. He was transmusic.

MB: Absolutely. Sound was his thing. He played the guitar, but he could get any sound in the world through it, and sound was what he was looking for. I think that he was the most advanced. There was no one near him in any way. He had everything: speed, control, and on and on. And I talked this way about him when he was alive, man. The cat

was the most amazing guitarist I had ever met in my life. He had huge hands. Incredible finger positions that I had never seen. He was so unorthodox that it was really strange, he used that giant thumb of his and played the weirdest chords. I think his work will be studied for years and years. And you know, I never tried to imitate him or take on his style when I played. I've just never heard anybody come near him. I've heard guys that were doing direct imitations of him, like Blue Cheer, but they weren't even in the same league. The nearest thing I've ever heard of the Hendrix kind of playing was done by a guy named Randy California (with Spirit). He knew Hendrix from way before.

GP: Today, what's Michael Bloomfield doing?

MB: I'm cutting an LP. I hope to make this my best guitar playing record of all. Mark Naftlin, the best piano player I know, will be making the album with me. You know, there're different fields, and Mark is not a Theolonius Monk and he doesn't play like Monk. His school of playing is very similar to the way I play. And in blues, next to Ray Charles, I've

Continued on page 47

MIKE BLOOMFIELD

Continued from page 38

never heard a better blues pianist. I am going to make it with him and I hope there's going to be a 50/50 dialogue between us in musical interaction. Like there's a very good album with Jim Hall (GP Vol. 4 No. 2 1970) and Bill Evans. It's called *Undercurrents* and is a very good guitar-piano album. The same guy who does Blood, Sweat And Tears, Roy Halee, is going to engineer our album. This is going to be my best playing record, because none of the records I have done have ever satisfied me. Everything that I've played on records I have heard better on tape, like live gigs. Way better. So much better that it's ridiculous. But I hope this to be indicative of this period of my life, my definitive record. A record of me playing up to this period of life.

GP: Is this going to be city blues?

MB: No, it's going to be a piece of music, but it's going to incorporate all the early sounds that I liked so much. Of course, I'll do blues scales and gospel scales. It'll be on that, but it just won't be stone blues. Listen to some Charlie Mingus albums, you know. They have sounds like the church and sounds like a barnyard and sounds like everything, but you call it jazz. Mark and I have very similar tastes, so it will have all the things we like on it. We were both up with the music of the 50's and also we're into a lot of improvisation. We would like to tie it up in an intelligent fashion. It will all make sense if we get it together right. But mostly I want it to be long periods of time, good 20–30 minutes of meaty chunks of playing.

GP: Do you have any last bit of advice for guitarists?

MB: Yeah. There are times when I don't play at all. Sometimes I don't even touch the guitar for months on end. I play the piano, listen to tapes, listen to records – but that's not good enough. All you young guitar players keep those hands moving and play as much as you can; but my God, if you don't play, you must listen, because listening to music is sometimes as important as playing. So if you're not going to be practicing a lot and everything, then listen. And just don't try to cop hot licks. Try to understand the whole field of music, the whole genre. And once you understand that, then you will see how everything relates to everything. One of my greatest fetishes is American music and how everything relates to it.■

2004 Oct. Special edition of Guitar Player: "Heroes of the Electric Blues" with citations from the above two articles.

Michael Bloomfield

America's White Blues Prodigy

It's a bit weird—although really no stranger than what was happening over in England at the time—that America's first great white blues guitarist was a rich Jewish kid who received a guitar as a bar mitzvah gift. But Michael Bloomfield's cultural DNA was transformed by an early exposure to rockabilly and blues radio shows, and the experiences triggered a ferocious passion for music and a life-long devotion to the guitar. There was also a fair amount of rebellion present in the psychic transfer.

By the time he was 15 years old, Bloomfield was so immersed in blues guitar that he would sneak out of his family's upscale home on Chicago's North Side and haunt the blues clubs on the city's South Side. Seeking to hear Muddy Waters and other players, he'd simply stand by the door and listen whenever he was denied entry. But there were many times when the ballsy teen would not only bluff his way into some seedy bar, he'd also step onstage to jam with the house band. By 18, Bloomfield felt he had mastered both "real fast, bluesy rock and roll" and folk stylings (including Travis picking), and he focused on managing a club and promoting acoustic "living room" performances in the homes of obscure Chicago bluesmen. Although he often related in interviews that he had quit playing guitar for a while, Bloomfield was active enough onstage and in the studio to beguile producer John Hammond, who signed the guitarist to a CBS recording contract in 1964. Those sides went unreleased at the time, however, because CBS couldn't figure out how to market a white blues guitarist.

In 1965, Bloomfield joined the Paul Butterfield

"I always lean toward the funkier sound. Like, I prefer Link Wray's 'Rumble' to anything by Duane Eddy."

Blues Band, and the group's gutsy, rock-fueled take on urban blues was a smashing success. Bloomfield rapidly ascended to guitar hero status, and was tapped to perform on Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited*, as well as at the folk singer's controversial electric set during the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. The next year, Bloomfield's enthusiasm for *all* music propelled Butterfield's *East-West* album into a thrilling blend of eastern motives (especially ragas), psychedelia, jazz, and full-tilt blues. Not surprisingly, the stylistic mélange was incredibly seductive to San Francisco's flower children, and the band became one of the scene's big concert draws.

By then, Bloomfield wasn't digging the group's direction or the audience response ("It's just a bunch of stoned kids lying on the floor," he complained), and he quit Butterfield to live in the San Francisco Bay Area and form Electric Flag—a band that further expanded Bloomfield's palette with the addition of a horn section. But Bloomfield didn't stick around to truly develop the act's promise. His distaste for "being a product" and the "success craziness" of the band's management—as well as the stress of working in a group with a few junkies—drove him to quit before the debut Electric Flag album even hit the racks. In 1968, he reluctantly partnered with organ player/producer Al Kooper on the jam-oriented *Super Session*, and ended up delivering the most commercially successful album of his career.

Sadly, the '70s dissolved into a haze of bad luck, career missteps, and drug and alcohol abuse. Bloomfield would bounce between projects such as doing porn soundtracks for the Mitchell Brothers, joining "super groups" (*Triumvirate* with John Hammond and Dr. John and KGB with Rik Grech and Carmine Appice), and recording an instructional album (*If You Love These Blues, Play 'Em As You Please*) for *Guitar Player* magazine. Nothing really worked for long, and, on more than one occasion, Bloomfield could be found ranting "Michael Bloomfield is too f**ked up to play tonight" in the bathrooms of the venues in which he was scheduled to perform.

In 1981, America's premier white blues gui-

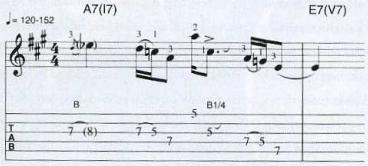
SONIC CSI! COP A LICK FROM MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD

Michael Bloomfield was arguably the most chromatic blues player ever. The secret spice in his barbecue was the ♭5, the bluest of blue notes. Bloomfield especially liked to contrast the ♭5 with its ♮5 sibling. This signature move is ubiquitous in the punchy "Born In Chicago" from the first Paul Butterfield album. For instance, **Ex. 1** starts with E♭ (♭5 in the key of *A*) and ends on an anticipated E♮ that heralds the *V7* chord. The quarter-bend in beat three is also a Bloomfield trademark. For him, moving in and around notes was an exciting part of the game. "To bend strings microtonally," he explained, "means playing across the fingerboard instead of up and down. There are 14 possible notes within seven frets. If you have a good enough ear—like Ravi Shankar or Jimi Hendrix—there are 21 steps within those seven frets. Your guitar will sound more vocal if you play this way."

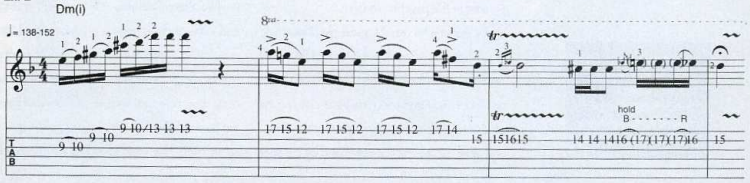
In the title cut from Paul Butterfield's *East-West* album, you can hear how Ornette Coleman influenced rockers of the time. Suddenly everyone needed to record at least one "outside" solo, and this was Bloomfield's moment. Abandoning blues-scale conventions for this *Dm* vamp, he cut loose with snarling, whining sitar-like licks, Wes-inspired octave riffs, and the lick in **Ex. 2**. It's the intensity of Bloomfield's attack that makes the crazed chromatic colors work.

—EXCERPTED FROM ANDY ELLIS' APRIL '95 BLOOMFIELD LESSON, "FULL BLOOM"

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



tarist of the '60s died alone in his car from a drug overdose. He was just 37 years old.

—MICHAEL MOLENDA

Quotes excerpted and edited from Guitar Player *features by Michael Brooks (June '71 and August '71).*

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Beginnings

"I started playing guitar when I was 13 years old, and I had a guitar teacher for about a year and a half. He taught me chords and theory—what little stuff I know—and also some lead stuff. Toward the end of the lesson, he would have me play these standards out of a fake book—they showed the chord changes and the melody—and he would play the leads and improvise. That's how I learned how to play rhythm guitar.

"Outside the lessons, I was into '50s rock and roll—AM radio stuff, Carl Perkins and Sun Records stuff, Chuck Berry, and whatever was on the dial. And very very rarely would I hear blues or black music. But way at the end of the radio dial in Chicago was a show called *Jam with Sam* that I heard when I was about 14. That station played stone blues, man, and I just liked that music most of all. And that same year, I went down with a friend of mine to hear Muddy Waters. We took a bus and two trains to get to the club—two little kids going down there to a funky bar—and they wouldn't let us in. We just stood outside and listened. At the same time, I was really interested in commercial folk music like Odetta and Bob Gibson and Josh White. But, as I got older, I got real interested in more ethnic-type folk music. I call it ethnic music, but if it were like blues, I would prefer Lightnin' Hopkins to Brownie McGee, because Lightnin' seemed more real."

LISTEN!

Paul Butterfield Blues Band [Paul Butterfield], 1965
East-West [Paul Butterfield], 1966
A Long Time Comin' [Electric Flag], 1968
Super Session [with Al Kooper], 1968


The Hot-Licks Kid

"When I was 14, I was just a regular hot-licks kid, and I wanted to learn. Like, if you wanted to play in a rock band at the time, you had to know that the ideal guitar player was not inventive, but the guy who could play just like Duane Eddy or Chuck Berry or Buddy Holly or the Ventures. It was the guy who could copy every guitar solo note-for-note perfect from the record. And so that's what I tried to do. At the same time, though, I was hearing this stuff on the blues radio station, and I was trying to throw as much of that stuff into my playing as I could. And so, by the time I was 15, I was a real fast, bluesy rock and roll player. I had all the notes, but I wasn't putting them in the right places at all. It took many years later for that to develop. You see, my theory of music was to imitate as exactly as you can, and you'll be doing all right. That lasted for quite a while until I learned some good musical values."

Folk

"I started with an acoustic, f-hole-style dance band guitar, and then I went to electric and played as many rock and roll lounges and gigs as I could when I was 15. And then I got a Martin and I started learning folk music. I started playing as much of that as I could. At the time, I was really interested in playing ethnic folk music, bluegrass, and Travis picking. By the time I was 18, I was about as good at that as anyone in the world has ever been. I was a mean picker at that time."

Listening

"There are times when I don't play at all. Sometimes, I don't even touch the guitar for months on end. I play the piano and listen to tapes and records. Young guitar players should keep their hands moving and play as much as they can. But if you can't play, you must listen, because listening to music is sometimes as important as playing. And don't just try to cop hot licks. Try to understand the whole field of music—the whole genre. Once you understand that, you'll see how everything relates to everything."

Vocalizing

"It took me a long time to get interested in singing. Not *me* singing, but listening to vocal sounds. The finest guitarists are those who can imitate voices. The more vocally you can play guitar, the more human you're going to sound."

Shredding

"Speed alone isn't important, but it's good to have speed *and* feeling. Listen to Django Reinhardt and Charlie Christian and you'll hear feeling and speed."

MICHAEL'S GEAR

Guitars: Gibson Les Paul, Gibson SG, Fender Telecaster.
Amps: Fender Super Reverb, Fender Bassman, Fender Showman, Acoustic.
Strings & Things: Fender Rock and Roll Lights, bicycle handlebar cut for slide.

Action

"I like a high action. I like a guitar to give me pull, and I like something to pull against. So I like strings that aren't too loose, and I like an action that's not loose either. I want to feel something tactile that I can play against."

Finesse

"A lot of people can't play fast unless they play real hard. You should be able to bend notes and sustain them for a long time at the lowest possible volume. I can hold out a note so you'd think I'm using a sustain unit or feedback, but it doesn't have anything to do with volume, it's just absolutely equal vibrato pressure with my hands almost setting up sympathetic vibrations with the other strings. It's really important to learn to control your hands."

The Bloomfield Concept

"Ideally, as a musician, I would like to be like Ornette Coleman or Roland Kirk. I would just like to play endless streams of melody encompassing every sort of tradition my ears have come upon. I always seem to have these two musical concepts going in my mind: a very pure blues approach and an unpure, anything-goes-as-long-as-it's-harmonically-germane-and-intelligent style of guitar playing. And I work hard on both of them." ■

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1972 January 6 – Rolling Stone.
"Two Nights Only: Butter & Bloomer" A review of a "reunion" gig in Boston probably December 21 and 22, 1971.

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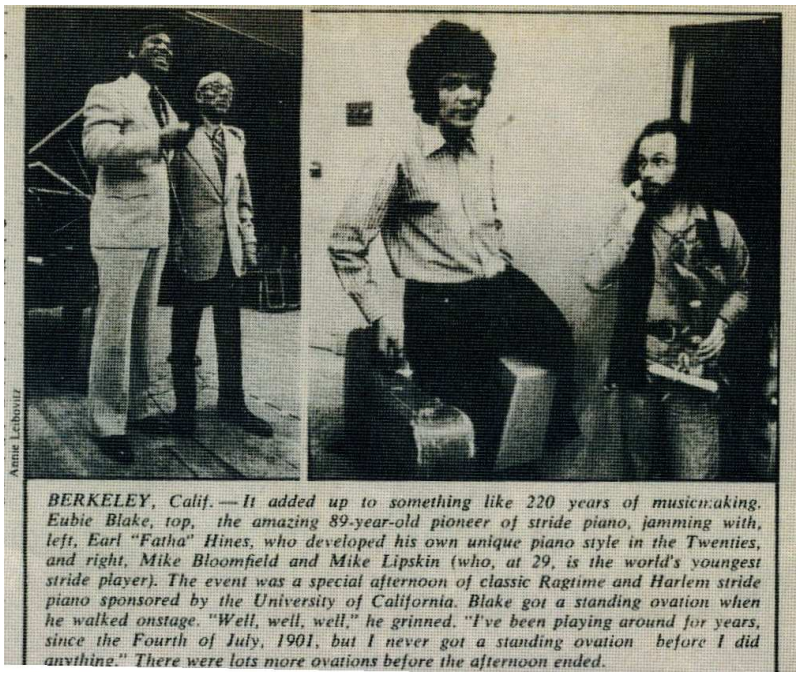
1972 May 25 – Rolling Stone



Anne Leibovitz

BERKELEY, Calif. — It added up to something like 220 years of musicmaking. Eubie Blake, top, the amazing 89-year-old pioneer of stride piano, jamming with, left, Earl "Fatha" Hines, who developed his own unique piano style in the Twenties, and right, Mike Bloomfield and Mike Lipskin (who, at 29, is the world's youngest stride player). The event was a special afternoon of classic Ragtime and Harlem stride piano sponsored by the University of California. Blake got a standing ovation when he walked onstage. "Well, well, well," he grinned. "I've been playing around for years, since the Fourth of July, 1901, but I never got a standing ovation before I did anything." There were lots more ovations before the afternoon ended.

1973 March 29 – Rolling Stone.
Review of another reunion gig at Winterland.

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1973 – Improvising Rock Guitar – Green Note Music Publications
Foreword by Michael Bloomfield. Includes demo flexi record (No MB).

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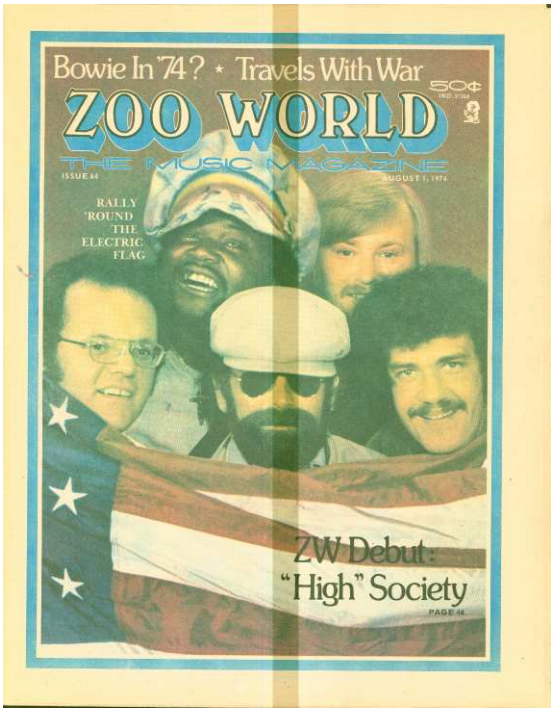
1974 August 1 – Zoo World # 64, The Music Magazine.
Article on Electric Flag by Arthur Levy. 4 pages with original photos.



THE WAR IS OVER

A Rock 'N Roll Revival In Six Parts

by ARTHUR LEVY
Photos by Mario Algaze

Part 1. The Electric Flag: Prelude

"... These five people are really unique," and then a long pause and a hundred millimeter 9 P.M. nicotine drag, "... coming together as a group," and then another pause, and Debby O'Brien is furrowing her Doris Day brows, searching for the words to set in stone, or searching for the invocation to *my* Electric Flag *Reunion* story, "... because the background and the musical maturity you can give to any one of them, the changes they've all gone through in the last five years for all of them to come back again," and it's becoming clearer — her frustration — as she grows more serious and resolute, until she collapses back a glorious heap in her chair, "... I'm extremely emotional about the group."

With that, Tommy Dowd (who was sitting next to me in the anteroom of Criteria's celebrated Studio C) bounded up to open the door for Howie Albert, himself working late on sessions somewhere else in the complex. Could a clavinet be borrowed, well now it's out of tune and we're not even using it, then how about this other, well that one's out of tune also but we're using it, then pass, bye Howie. The ubiquitous Dowd, producer with Jerry Wexler of these Electric Flag sessions for Atlantic Records, gingerly excused himself, went back into the studio to listen to a playback of "Earthquake Country," and the anteroom's solitude reverted to me and Debbie, as I met her crystal gaze coming down again.

"... When I first heard them play in California I was managing another group at the time that was also on the bill at Monterey, playing at the Monterey Pop Festival in '67, and I had been a blues fan for many years and their energy," here she struggled again with *my* story in *her* words and *her* recollections. "Have you ever heard *Monterey*?"

That would be the summer of 1967, the summer of love and Haight-Ashbury, free LSD and the Grateful Dead and Jimi Hendrix and *Crawdaddy!* and the Doors, but no Monterey. I was stuck working in a hardware factory, making bucks to drive back to Brandeis in the fall in a 1959 Jaguar 3.4. No Monterey for me that summer of '67. I only managed both Newport festival weekends by the skin of my teeth — and Monterey might as well have been Joujouka to this stranded bohemian. "No," I fessed, "but I saw the flick."

Until *Woodstock* came along two years later, Monterey stood as the prototype. As if the flicks did justice to either event (they didn't, and I've still never seen *Woodstock*, cause I was *there*), they still managed to immortalize a handful of the bands that played at each. Where Sly, Cocker, and Hendrix were deified at Woodstock, it was Hendrix, Otis, and the Electric Flag who stood out at Monterey. Yet by the time *Monterey Pop* was released Otis Redding was dead, Mike Bloomfield had left the Electric Flag after one Lp, and pitiable Lyndon Johnson (whose voice introduces that first Electric Flag Lp) had decided not to throw his Stetson in the ring for the 1969 elections. Seven-year old thoughts rushed on, even Lillian Roxon's tacit description of the Flag as "a strange mixture of innocence and experience ... a dream band," until that gaze brought me back to Monterey, where the Flag played in front of an audience for the first time and won.

"And yet tearing it down they were already heading toward the breakup, but even with that at hand it was still a breathtaking experience to see them. So my involvement with them in the *reconstruction* has been as much emotional as anything else — I want this so badly for them, what price glory, whatever." Reconstruction made me think of the Civil War: a cornea vision of brother against brother in brutal senseless conflict, agonizing internal struggling, then one final wrenching dissolution as all the parts tore away from each other, Independence Day in reverse.

Meanwhile, the Booger Bear Mr. Buddy Miles strides around in front of us and takes a seat next to his manager, Debby, who already is recalling the dissolution of Cream, their last days, when they traveled from gig to gig in separate private chartered planes, staying in separate hotels with separate transportation and not seeing each other until the moment the three walked out onstage. A psychic extreme, or the seeds of one, transcended by this new Flag.

"Well, if you mean do I have my old feeling back," Buddy cautiously offers into the conversation, "it's like it never left, it's just been seven or eight years since we've been together; quite naturally, it takes time to get those feelings where they were before, you can imagine." Those feelings really haven't left, you mean? "Not to me ... I was always into the band, it just never materialized, never *happened*, it never reached any climax, it's just one of those things you start that you never finish, and finally it looks now like some things are really gonna get started, the way it should be."

Part 2. The Tyranny of Democracy

The next evening, less than 24 hours later, even more tracks had been laid down by the band, and at least the general uneasiness of adjustment to Criteria had been overcome. In fact, no one thought it would be this easy to marry "the Criteria sound" with the sound of the Electric Flag, but the tracks were there and "Earthquake Country" and "(Play Your) Sweet Soul Music" sounded even better the second time around. Typically, studio C was aflutter with old ladies, roadies, managers (Debby O'Brien, and Buddy's tour manager George Khachadourian, "Khach,") and Nick Gravenites, the barrel of a singer-songwriter whose voice alone had always been something of an Electric Flag trademark to me. I couldn't account for his frankness, but in talking of the demise of the original Flag the phrase "tyranny of democracy" tumbled out, like a seven-year itch.

"Used to be we had an 8-piece band and six or seven of the guys thought something was cool and they would overrule the opposition, but that's tyranny in a way, so now we're trying to accommodate everybody. If one person says 'no man, this ain't what's happenin' then we don't beat it into his head and force him to take the democratic decision — we just have to cop to it: Well, we can't *make* him do it." Was this tyranny the tragic flaw of the old band?

"No, the tragic flaw of the old band was drugs, hard drugs, and the irreconcilable differences it caused in the band ... it's tough to see your friends abuse themselves, especially to the point where you watch them die a couple of times, or come close to death — it outrages your sense of life that you can only go so far until you say screw it." Nick never went that far, though he would get involved to the point of going out and busting heads of dealers who were supplying his friend's habits. Somehow after all those years, after Mike Bloomfield and Barry Goldberg especially had licked their own drug hangups, it seemed easy for Gravenites to chalk it all up to artistic temperament and the craziness of the era, however inescapable it was then. Now the important thing is giving everybody as much room as possible to grow, not so much to sidestep the interpersonal conflicts as to allow them to dissipate over time without bending out of shape and losing the band again, keeping it to the point where they can all remain friends, where there's a place for even the craziest one to fit in without the differences becoming irreconcilable, where the individual is never tyrannized.

"It's not a necessary ingredient for intense creativity that you suffer and be driven crazy and argue and fight and be ego maniacal, it's not *that* critical; it's critical when you're young cause everything's that way, it's intense, it's crazy, you're driven up and down with emotional problems, hassles, you have junk problems, sexual problems, all kinds of crazy shit. Over the last five or six years a lot of the guys have just worked that all out till they don't think twice about it — they evolve a lifestyle and don't get hung up about it. But that conflict — I'm not saying it doesn't exist, but it's voiced now, it's out in the open, it's not that secret hostility; they're voiced, they're dealt with, that's what keeps each individual going." And Gravenites proceeded to pull together the five members of the band better than anyone could have done.

"All this time Barry's been in New York pursuing a professional songwriting career, which he's done before in Chicago, that whole Brill Building/Tin Pan Alley bit, something I've never done — groups did my songs cause I was around them, got involved with them — but Barry was just straight biz, hustle up a tune and try to get 25 bucks out of it, involved at that level in New York for years, trying to get a break of some kind, and finally got it with Gladys Knight's bit bit out of 'Imagination.' And thank God 'Imagination' broke for him too, cause it'd be terrible to have him show up completely whipped and broke and a failure, a drag because nobody else in the band is at level. But he showed up with a hit under his belt and a couple more cooking and a future so I was glad for him.

"Before the Flag was around, Buddy was a young kid of 17 or 18 years old working on the road with Wilson Pickett. But those type of pickup bands were just like slavery — if you messed up the leader would fine you. And Pickett thought he was the hottest thing in the whole world, a giant star, and these other musicians were his minions, who got paid a salary — with fines on top of it — and traveled in a bus, hired help was what it was.

"So Michael came along and said, 'come and be the drummer in my band,' none of this bullshit, be an equal partner, a chance to make a career for himself — Buddy immediately took it and that's how he started to make a

Buddy: "I was always into the band"

Nick: "I protect the middle class"

Jerry: "I'm very determined"

name for himself, and he'll never forget it, that he got his chance to be somebody because Michael pulled him out of this ghetto band with this tyrant, and into the so-called hippie west coast scene, and Buddy had a chance to be himself, and without that — who knows? It would've been Buddy Miles the drummer for fifty black bands touring by bus coast to coast, and he could still be out there.

"Jelly Roll the bass player's another professional, had his own bands, he's been in Nashville, a studio musician, professional songwriter — we just found out he owns a piece of 'Ball 'n Chain,' 20 percent of the tune or something that he bought years ago on some kind of a deal — this cat's been around but not in that bandleader aspect like Buddy Miles hustling for the last five years in airplanes. . .."

"Myself, I played a little bit with Big Brother and the Holding Company after the flag, had my own band Blue Geary for awhile, played with Mike Bloomfield and Friends in his aggregation-type band, then just long periods of doing absolutely nothing — playing golf, fixing up my house, playing chess, hanging out, just *living* I call it . . .the role I'm playing now in the Flag isn't a gigantic role at all, to be honest with myself. I write some tunes for the band, I sing on some of the songs, and play guitar on very few of them. So my vision of what I am in the band I don't inflate at all, it's just a minimal involvement: If I don't want to play rhythm guitar on a certain piece then I *don't* want to play it man. I just don't.

"I don't leap up and offer opinions like the way I used to. I do a lot more hanging out now. I don't get involved in violent arguments. I protect the middle class and stand up for 'em — if one of the lunatics goes crazy on somebody who's not in the scene I'll tend to stick up for the other person and not try to offend anyone. I see myself, though in a minimal role, but an important one: In the sense that I add a certain kind of music to the band that they wouldn't ordinarily do. The Flag with me gives a little heavy rock, *blue rock*; without me they'd be doing soul music and straight blues. I just add a little funk rock blues to it and without me they wouldn't have it, cause they wouldn't do it.

"Essentially we're still working towards a point. We go in and practice something that sounds perfect, we go in here and record it and hear things that don't sound so good on record so we change it, work at it, evolve it, and while we evolve it Michael may get depressed with it, Buddy might get pissed off at it and crazy, Jellyroll just might say 'you're expecting too much,' I might say 'I'm not gonna sing this song 28 times in a row — screw you,' all of that happens, but I expect that it's life. The thing is for nobody to make it into a killing floor offense that's all, nobody leap up and walk out, nobody leap up and pull out a gun and shoot somebody, that's not it — you don't get a take that way!" And Tommy Dowd looked at Gravenites when he heard that and laughed, and Debby laughed and Kleach, and me, and soon everybody was laughing.

Part 3. Jerry Wexler, Atlantic Records

"Basically there are three kinds of producers," Jerry Wexler is explaining to me, "the engineer who becomes a producer, like a Bones Howe or Tommy Dowd; then the arrangers and musicians, like Arif Mardin or Jack Nietzsche; then the guys like myself who come in on a pass and just developed a way of putting a record together." Wexler's experience inside the studio has been virtually dominated by single singers, from Ruth Brown and Ray Charles through Aretha Franklin, Maggie Bell, Doug Sahm, and Barry Goldberg. He can hardly remember the last time he worked with a band, if he ever did at all, so the Electric Flag assumes historical countenance on still another level.

Criteria doesn't know from being closed on Memorial Day, it's business as usual when Jerry Wexler ushers me upstairs into Mack Emmerman's office, between playbacks going on in the studio downstairs. "It was my idea," is how Wexler deftly handles the issue of just exactly how and why and where these sessions ever got together in the first place. Where Dylan was the mediating force that brought Goldberg to Wexler last year, it was Goldberg, once his album was released, who kept telling Wexler about how Mike Bloomfield would come around all the time and listen to Goldberg's tapes and records in his New York apartment.

"So just pondering Mike Bloomfield and knowing that he was anxious to play I said to Barry, 'Do you think there's a chance of maybe putting the Flag together?' I didn't know how Buddy would stand on it so we started making a round of phone calls, I don't remember who called who, but when we got done in a few days everyone was hot to trot, yeah, let's do it." Wexler first met Bloomfield in 1967, at Monterey, and cast an envious eye on the Electric Flag. Apparently, though Albert Grossman was determined to see his band signed to Columbia (Dylan's label, whom he also managed), Wexler's love of the band never died. As a result, Wexler will be producing the Flag for "as long as they want me," alternating album releases with Columbia and Atlantic, who'll get *this* first LP.

"I think this band will fill a function," Wexler declares, "they'll bring people the music they want to hear. I can't think of an exact analog and that's good, right? Maybe the Allman Bros., that certain kind of loose funk — but the Allman's have a country rock base and this has a Chicago blues base plus the development of Buddy Miles in the interim years. He's come into a lot of notions musically, he's got a lot of new influences: Gamble and Huff, Barry White, plus the old blues groove, so he's got a contemporary black funky thing."

Understanding Wexler's role inside the studio is considerably more difficult than understanding his role in setting up this whole project since the beginning of the year. "The real essence of production is being able to *change* the music," Wexler emphasizes, and for a non-musician producer like himself the demand is put on the musicians inside the studio to master the technical part of the performance, "cause I just don't have any facility for that, I work by ear only." For these Electric Flag sessions, Tom Dowd in effect becomes another set of ears for Wexler.

And Dowd is nothing short of incredible. "Michael is great," Dowd tells Debby and I in a conversation later on, "for going off on the 6-7-9 trip and that warps Barry and warps Jellyroll once in awhile cause Barry's always playing a simple triad and Jellyroll is once in awhile peddling on a 5, and if Michael's off on a 6 the two of 'em look at each other like they're crazy — What chord are you playing? they'll say — and they're in the same chord it's just that the inversion doesn't have empathy anymore; they're each singing a counter melody and they're each singing correctly, except here they go running across each other — they just have a little discipline thing to get organized, which they still do." It was Dowd who went out to San Rafael for the rehearsals of the Flag before they came to Criteria, and one of his tasks was to note the chords and changes on the tunes they proposed to do when they got to Florida — by the time they got to Studio C Dowd's charts were obsolete, only the melodies remained the same.

Still, when Wexler leaves at the end of the week to go to Muscle Shoals (to produce a solo album by Donnie Fritts, with Kristofferson co-producing), most of the tracks should already be down and Dowd will stay on to supervise the overdubbing of vocals, instrumental parts, and mixdown.

The Bonzaroo Horns, who played on Bill Wyman's solo and Dr. John's latest Lp, "Look," says Wexler to me, leaning forward and rotating me in my chair, "I just go ahead and do my job, you know what I mean? I'm very determined, I've got a lot of stamina and a lot of psychic energy and I'm just barreling through."

Part 4. Barry Goldberg, The Imagination

A couple of days later, at 9:30 in the morning, Barry Goldberg and his wife Gail were already into their second hour of pre-noon sun near the pool at the Thunderbird Motel, where the Electric Flag entourage was holed-up. Goldberg's thoughtful serenity as he discussed the last ten years of his life was no less than a complement to Gravenites' garrulous pulpiements, yet Goldberg, unlike Gravenites or any of the others, always seemed to measure his storytelling in a talmudic sense, internally organizing his points, gazing to the ocean for support, a real *mensch*.

"I really didn't understand Wexler — where he was actually coming from, how he works, how he's so dedicated — until I saw him at an Aretha Franklin session and he was telling everyone, including Aretha, just *exactly* what he wanted," Goldberg, the eternal "Wexler freak" doesn't know how to temper his admiration of the man who Lotti Golden (in her *Rolling Stone* article five months ago) called the "pappa-daddy . . . the King" of music, so Goldberg struggles with words like 'philosopher' and 'high priest' in trying to explain Wexler to me, on his own terms. "Whatever your high point is, he helps you reach it, and that's what a good producer is supposed to do.

"I knew that the Atlantic sound, with Wexler and Tommy and the Flag with the material — that was the missing link, cause we never had a producer on the first album. We had the energy and the imagination and the ideas that were really far ahead — using horns and a lot of different kinds of music — but we didn't have the proper leadership as far as a producer or a conductor or arranger that we have now."

Goldberg was a heavily Chicago-dues'd 25 years old when Bloomfield, himself a veteran of the Rush Street blues bars-and-broads scene, brought him the idea of "an American Music Band . . . to play all forms of American music," not just the blues and jazz both were familiar with, but the strains of folk that Bloomfield had introduced Goldberg to at the Newport Festival in 1965 — Son House, Mance Lipscomb, Sleepy John Estes, even the Beers Family — plus

Goldberg: The eternal Wexler freak

Bloomfield: No quick bucks, no way

Jelly Roll: "You name 'em, I backed 'em up"

the kind of rhythm 'n blues thing Goldberg knew best, that he'd been playing in Big John's with Steve Miller for a year or so after getting his ass kicked out of New York. Bassist Harvey Brooks was considered the "Big Daddy" of New York's bass players because of the enormous variety of session work he did, and was quickly recruited; Buddy Miles, fresh out of Omaha, Nebraska, was discovered shaking the walls playing drums for Wilson Pickett at Murray the K's 1967 Easter Show and was rescued, irridescent suit and all, from the Wicked Pickett's band; then a friend of Goldberg's, Peter Strazza on tenor sax, and a friend of Larry Coryell's, Marcus Doubleday on trumpet.

"And Nick was like the President of Chicago, the President of the Association of blues and funk and philosophy who also had a voice and a style that no one in the world ever had — he didn't sound like anyone but Nick... we needed him to round the whole thing out, make it sturdy, give it the roots.

"And it really worked, it was a bombastic thing, like one those sci-fi movies where this big-band monster, not wanting to, just cuts everybody down wherever he goes — we'd be into Jackie Wilson's 'Higher and Higher' and the flag started to wave and we just got these *rushes*." After six months with the Flag, starting with scoring the soundtrack for *The Trip* and winding up with the Huntington Beach one joint-bust, with Monterey and the first Lp in between, Goldberg's heavily-drugged surreal dream washed away.

After three years he woke up in New York, with Gail his rescuing angel: "Hey, this kid's had too much grief, he's already made the commitment, he *wants* to live, so as long as he's gonna live with an honorable commitment, give him an honorable start." Three years more hustling with record companies, giving piano lessons, and doing the Tin Pan Alley/Brill Building routine with songwriter Gerry Goffin resulted in his re-establishing ties with Dylan, who brought him to Woodstock to jam with the Band and Doug Sahm, among others, after a phone call. "We got into things like listening to oldies-but-goodies stations together, Smokey Robinson songs, Gene Vincent songs, and he called me up in New York three days later and said 'I got Jerry Wexler on the phone — do you want to cut an album for Atlantic? The only thing is I gotta produce it.' So that was that, something happened." Before Goldberg's album was completed, the idea for re-forming the Electric Flag was already in the air; before the reviews of Goldberg's album were all in print, Wexler was already *potchking* with the Electric Flag.

"Wexler looked at it like this basket of cobras that you'd look into real quick, then close it after you'd see how the cobras were doing. He thought it was like some really crazy bunch of guys in a street gang or something — but it wasn't like that, we just *looked* like that," Barry Goldberg chortled through his beard, "he knows it now, he's getting to know everybody, digging where everybody's coming from, and it's a very happy relationship. And he's already talking about the second album, which is very far out."

Part 5. Dinner With The Boys

That same night, Michael Bloomfield borrowed a pair of sunglasses from soul-gospel keyboarder Richard Tee, who'd been brought down from New York for *sweetening* on a few tracks, and suggested I join him and Goldberg and bassplayer Roger "Jelly Roll" Troy and Alex the engineer for a late supper. By the time we got to Gorky's, an over-rated Wolfie's-type restaurant/deli, Bloomfield's legendary "cool" to the press had warmed considerably, and I'm thinking that all his schmoozing about television comedians and Richard Pryor is just his way of saying to me that when he's ready, he's ready.

In the meantime, between courses of kreplach, chopped liver, maneuvering the urns of pickled cukes and tomatoes and sauerkraut around, Jelly Roll is telling me about his days in Cincinatti backing up James Brown in an all-white studio band known as the Days. He also hooted it on the road with Allen Freed as part of the Hollywood Argyles ("Alley Oop"), when he was a teenager; there was also a band called the Fingermen and a single, "Mulekinner Blues." Richard Podolor (early producer of Three Dog Night) produced Jelly's solo album on Kapp, entitled *Jelly Roll* — all as a prelude to the Howard Wales-Jerry Garcia project, *Hooteroll?*, an early Douglas Lp that brought Jelly Roll to Bloomfield's attention, via his playing bass on it.

"I played with just about everybody in the world — you name 'em, I backed 'em up," says the burly, tall Kentuckian ("a cousin of mine," Bloomfield tells, "from the Kentucky side of the family"). He was recommended to Bloomfield by the Grateful Dead's Sam Cutler, after playing on the road with Doug Sahm, and came into Mike Bloomfield & Friends as a much-needed bassist-vocalist, rounding out the lineup with keyboarder Mark Naftalin (ex-Butterfield, like Bloomfield), and drummer George Rains, also a Sir Doug alumnus. When it became known that original Flag bassist Harvey Brooks couldn't/wouldn't leave the Fabulous Rhinestones to re-join the Flag, Jelly Roll's bass, voice, and songwriting knacks were quickly recruited.

By now Bloomfield, wolfing his boiled brisket and potato latkes and second order of creamed spinach like it was the day after a fast, has Duke Ellington's death on his mind, and the Duke's autobiography. "It's just like Rubenstein's book — only thing that's wrong is there's no dues, he doesn't talk about any dues. Just good times and honors and fabulous feasts in Europe and whatnot — he must've scuffled sometime though, some kind of bummers must've gone down but they're not in that book — I didn't like that...too much *Sugar Hill*." Bloomfield's mind is always working, associating, conceptualizing all the time.

"I'll tell you one difference between Buddy and me — his ambition is to be a musician forever — like Duke Ellington, to be known for his playing and singing. *I* only want to make enough money to get out of the business — yesterday, would be too late. That's what I'd like to do: get the money and stop cause there's things I like way better than playing music in front of people and traveling around the country doing it — I've done enough of it and I'm not really an entertainer. The applause and the smell of the greasepaint is *not* my incentive; I like to have a good time playing with the musicians and commune on that level, that's important to me, not the money, and I'm not interested in anything else about it.

"That's a big ideological conflict between Buddy and me — I wanna get out and he wants to stay in. But I don't think there's gonna be no quick bucks from the Electric Flag, no way, gonna have to work a long time for it. See, my habits now are to work enough to pay the rent for a couple of months, live good for as long as I can stretch it, then go out and work as little as I can to stay not working as long as possible, and it makes for a very pleasant life, you know?"

Bloomfield left the original Flag one night in late 1967, after manager Albert Grossman had booked the band into a pair of gigs on the same night — first in Fresno, then in L.A., "monumental gluttony" Debby O'Brien called it, though Grossman has been persuaded to sell the band's name back for this "reconstruction." Bloomfield then revolutionized rock on a pair of *Super Session* albums formulated in 1968 with Al Kooper; stayed rooted in Mill Valley while producing Otis Rush's *Mourning in the Morning* Lp with Gravenites for Atlantic's Cotillion label that year; showed up (with Miles, Butterfield, Sammy Lay, Duck Dunn, and Otis Spann) backing up Muddy Waters at the Super Cosmic Joy-Scout Jamboree concerts and Lp in April, 1969; recorded *It's Not Killing Me* (produced by Gravenites) for Columbia that year (with all the Mill Valley folk — John Kahn, Naftalin, Bob Jones *et al.*), followed by *Live at Bill Graham's Fillmore West*, with Gravenites, Taj Mahal, and the Mill Valley folk. The next time I spotted Bloomers was on Woody Herman's *Brand New* album for Fantasy, recorded March, 1971, and even more recently at the reunion of the Butterfield Blues Band.

At the ripe old age of 30 Bloomfield struggles to keep his art from becoming drudgery, and seriously ponders how to keep the working Electric Flag from becoming the one-man show it ended up as in 1968. "We were grateful to Buddy for shouldering a lot of the load — he was hip to the fact that it's what you had to do to keep your audiences going and he was more into it than we were at the time, way more into it; he intuitively knew it had to be done too, but as our own personal apathy with the road, drugs, whatever we were into would get on us — we would do less and less of what we had to do. And he shouldered more and more of the load — eventually it became so easy just to let Buddy take it, and he did cause God knows he could pound his way through the trip — and he took it successfully."

Part 6. Postscript: The War Is Over

The very last time I saw all five of the Electric Flag was a photo session at the Thunderbird Motel, the results of which partially accompany this story. Not long after Jerry Wexler left for Muscle Shoals I saw an ad for the Electric Flag appearing, of all places, at the Ozark Music Festival in Sedalia, Missouri, the third weekend in July. They have, it seems, come a long way from Monterey Pop.

Whatever happens to them, in the Ozarks or God knows where, Bloomfield's festoonive concept from the back of their first album always bears repeating:

The Electric Flag is an American Music Band. American music is not necessarily music directly from America. I think of it as the music you hear in the air, on the air, and in the streets; blues, soul, country, rock, religious music, traffic, crowds, street sounds and field sounds, the sound of people and silence.

It's been a long time comin' for the Electric Flag, but the War is over. My fellow Americans... (*Continued*)

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1976 June 11 – The Rock'n'Roll News.
Cover and a two page interview

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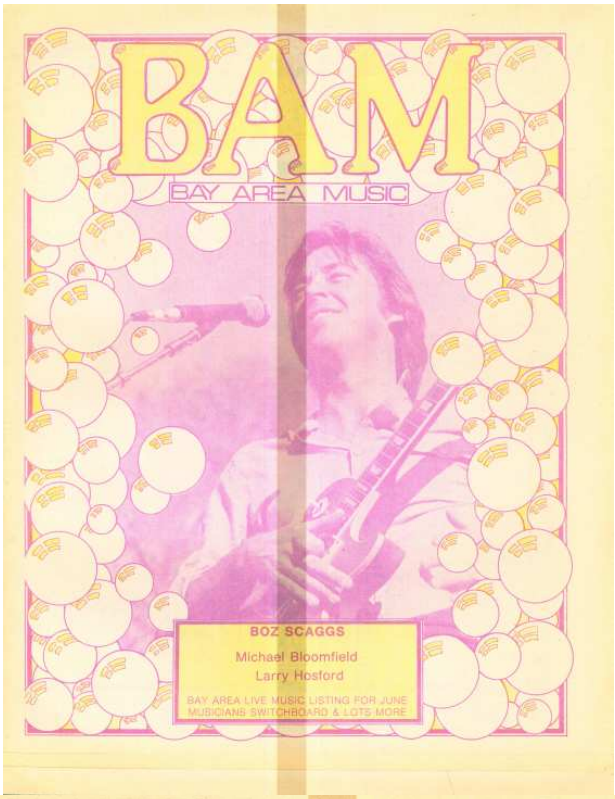
1976 June – BAM – Bay Area Music ´76 – A free magazine.
A 2 pages article: Mike Bloomfield: I wanna be the best.



Mike Bloomfield / *I wanna be the best*

By Terry Marshall

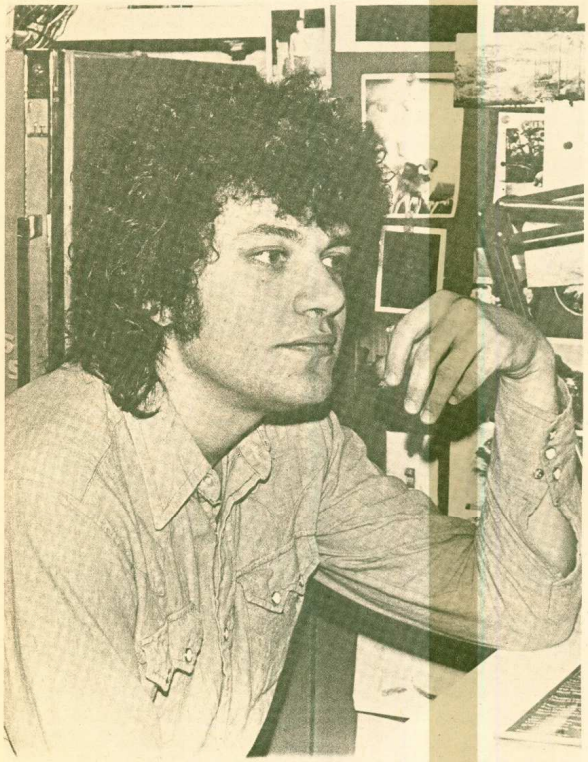
At 33, Mike Bloomfield is re-evaluating his career as a musician.

Right now, the most important goal in his life is to avoid becoming another one of rock's legendary shooting stars drifting from supergroup to supergroup, imitating a guitar style that he invented years ago, and abandoning his family in the process for endless roadwork. Instead, he sees himself becoming America's greatest guitar player, someone like Chet Atkins or Les Paul; when you think of America and a guitar, you'd think *Mike Bloomfield*.

"I would like to be bigger than either Atkins or Paul," says Bloomfield. "They've never had any AM record smashes, and I would like to do that. But just to limit my playing to rock and roll — that genre that me and Clapton damn near defined — to just rehash that again is silly. A Peter Frampton is like a junior Eric Clapton or a junior Mike Bloomfield. I've moved on. I play 'way more stuff than that now."

The immortality attached to being America's greatest guitar player is not something that is achieved overnight — like mere stardom sometimes is. However, Bloomfield has a plan in mind that he thinks will help him attain that goal and prevent him from becoming a seasonal sensation, a performer whose name is only good for the three or four months that he has a record in the top ten.

Ironically, it was last winter's KGB album — the album that ended the seven-year lapse in his recording career — that brought him to this reflective state. The album, which featured Ray Kennedy as lead vocalist, Barry Goldberg on keyboards, and Bloomfield on guitar, received a fair amount of airplay. It broke into the Hot 100 even before a promotional tour got underway (without Bloomfield), featuring KGB as the opening act for Joe Cocker. Soon after the album's release, Bloomfield announced his departure from the group in his traditionally outspoken manner.



According to Bloomfield, KGB was "a completely fabricated bullshit trip for a lot of money, where everyone was sort of burned." MCA Records and the management firm of Elliott Roberts (who also manages Neil Young and Joni Mitchell) "took people who had no reason to be in a band together and sold their names. The result was a non-band."

This is what happened. After the reunion and break up after one album of the original Electric Flag in late 1974, the Flag's keyboard player, Barry Goldberg, approached Roberts and asked him if he would like to manage the remnants of the Electric Flag.

Roberts said no. What he wanted was for Goldberg and Bloomfield to put together another band.

So Bloomfield assembled a group of Bay Area musicians with whom he had been playing for years, and he and Goldberg brought the band to Roberts' attention.

Roberts was unimpressed. He wanted a "supergroup" comprised of people with famous names. He kept Bloomfield and Goldberg and then began looking around for famous unemployed musicians.

The final line up included: Bloomfield; Goldberg; Rick Gretch (Blind Faith); Carmine Appice (Vanilla Fudge and most recently from Beck, Bogart and Appice); and Ray Kennedy, whom Bloomfield describes as "a singer Roberts had been trying to do something with for several years."

A record contract was obtained for the group, explained Bloomfield, "by telling the record company that this was a group of guys who have loved each other's asses for years and years and have always wanted to jam together in rock'n'roll bliss. When the band was assembled," he continued, "we all got together and agreed that it was a pretty sleazy trip and that we were all in it for the money — and we proceeded with the project."

Bloomfield described the recording of the KGB record as "hysterically funny". . . The record cost around $140,000. The producer did things like bring a string section of the L.A. Philharmonic in to play on four tunes without charts . . . no music. He had them play by ear . . . dozens of string players, walking around playing by ear.

"It was insane. I believe the only people who actually played on the KGB album were me and the singer. Studio musicians were used. Barry Goldberg left because his wife was expecting their first baby and because he never flies, which would preclude a tour. Rick Gretch couldn't play because of his health and immigration problems. Carmine (Appice) just refused to play and left. If this record sells millions and millions, we're not going to see zip from it 'cause we're really in the hole."

Midway through the KGB debacle, Bloomfield realized that the band was only delaying his own plans. He, too, left and returned to the Bay Area. There he rejoined the two bands with whom he is happiest working — his own and Nick Gravenites' band — performing what he describes as "a music history class, with all kinds of material from acoustic to electric." They currently have a 200-400 song repertoire from which to construct their act.

Bloomfield eventually resolved the KGB mess by having the tapes sent here so he could record close to home and get on with his project of becoming America's greatest guitar player.

He plans to do this by putting out records and getting on television shows. He also wishes to record for Muzak.

"I like music that is what I call 'Life Source Music' that you hear in elevators, hospital lobbies and restaurants," he said. "I don't think that it's the best possible music that it can be. I think I can make much more pleasant Muzak than they usually have; I like the concept of having music as a background track for whatever you're doing."

He also plans to record instructional records. With this in mind, he has just recorded an instructional record on blues guitar styles, to be released on MCA Records on August 1. It is his favorite record of his career so far because he believes it is his best. He doesn't want it to flash onto the record charts and then disappear.

He would prefer it to sell steadily over a long period of time, so he is trying to handle its promotion carefully.

"I would like to be the manipulator of my commodity," he explained. "I do not mind being a product, but I want to call the shots in the marketing of the product or find someone who I think can call the shots better than me and have him constantly checking with me."

Bloomfield is anxious for the record to be marketed directly to the public via television (similar to the K-Tel Greatest Hits packages, which are among the

mike bloomfield

photos by Ed Perlstein

biggest sellers), rather than being sold first in the music trade papers, and then to the public.

"TV is the biggest marketplace. It really gets your melon around there. The biggest media outlets — magazines, radio — are all small compared to TV, and late night TV is real cheap."

Aside from the blues record, Bloomfield is presently working on the score for the new Andy Warhol movie, *Ultrafilm*. He has a number of disco singles in mind that he wishes to record and release under the name Count Talent and the Originals.

There are recordings of concerts in the can, containing what he describes as some of the best guitar playing of his life, recorded under superb conditions when the band was at its hottest. Also, Columbia has an unreleased album that he feels sure will come out once his MCA material is released.

"They (Columbia) will drag out whatever I've recorded for them except Electric Flag. I don't think they can use that any more unless they get 19¢ bins in record stores."

Meanwhile, he will continue to perform in the Bay Area with his own band as well as Nick Gravenites' band. Notwithstanding his admiration for The Tubes, the Sons of Champlin and Creedence Clearwater Revival, Bloomfield has never felt that the Bay Area was really a prolific music scene, even when it was really known for the "San Francisco Sound."

He explains: "There's no recording scene or big management scene here. There's a prolific club scene, and you could work from Santa Cruz to Sonoma and stay busy all your life. Guys like me who've got a name get the best gigs 'cause we've been out here the longest, but if you've got something to say, you'll get a gig.

"I had an interesting conversation once with some guys from a young band in front of the West Dakota Club in Berkeley. They wanted to know why guys like me wouldn't quit playing around here so they could get the gigs. I said, 'no, man, I've been working for a long time, and if I want to work where I live, you'll just have to get better than me and draw more people and then you'll get the gigs. It's yours then; you'll get the promo; you'll get the breaks.' In the meantime, they should just be opening acts.

"I've been playing music professionally for 18 years, and I have no sympathy for a new band making it without paying a whole lot of dues. It's fine if the stars are with them and they make it in a flash, but if they want to make it without paying dues . . . well, that's it."

Mike Bloomfield *I wanna be the best*

Reprinted from BAM, June 1976

By Terry Marshall

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"It was insane. I believe the only people who actually played on the KGB album were me and the singer. Studio musicians were used. Barry Goldberg left because his wife was expecting their first baby and because he never flies, which would preclude a tour. Rick Gretch couldn't play because of his health and immigration problems. Carmine (Appice) just refused to play and left. If this record sells millions and millions, we're not going to see zip from it 'cause we're really in the hole."

Midway through the KGB debacle, Bloomfield realized that the band was only delaying his own plans. He, too, left and returned to the Bay Area. There he rejoined the two bands with whom he is happiest working — his own and Nick Gravenites' band — performing what he describes as "a music history class, with all kinds of material from acoustic to electric." They currently have a 200-400 song repertoire from which to construct their act.

Bloomfield eventually resolved the KGB mess by having the tapes sent here so he could record close to home and get on with his project of becoming America's greatest guitar player.

He plans to do this by putting out records and getting on television shows. He also wishes to record for Muzak.

"I like music that is what I call 'Life Source Music' that you hear in elevators, hospital lobbies and restaurants," he said. "I don't think that it's the best possible music that it can be. I think I can make much more pleasant Muzak than they usually have; I like the concept of having music as a background track for whatever you're doing."

He also plans to record instructional records. With this in mind, he has just recorded an instructional record on blues guitar styles, to be released on MCA Records on August 1. It is his favorite record of his career so far because he believes it is his best. He doesn't want it to flash onto the record charts and then disappear.

He would prefer it to sell steadily over a long period of time, so he is trying to handle its promotion carefully.

"I would like to be the manipulator of my commodity," he explained. "I do not mind being a product, but I want to call the shots in the marketing of the product or find someone who I think can call the shots better than me and have him constantly checking with me."

Bloomfield is anxious for the record to be marketed directly to the public via television (similar to the K-Tel Greatest Hits packages, which are among the

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Mike Bloomfield

continued from page 15

Photo: Greg Nakanishi

Michael Bloomfield

biggest sellers), rather than being sold first in the music trade papers, and then to the public.

"TV is the biggest marketplace. It really gets your melon around there. The biggest media outlets — magazines, radio — are all small compared to TV, and late night TV is real cheap."

Aside from the blues record, Bloomfield is presently working on the score for the new Andy Warhol movie, *Ultrafilm*. He has a number of disco singles in mind that he wishes to record and release under the name Count Talent and the Originals.

There are recordings of concerts in the can, containing what he describes as some of the best guitar playing of his life, recorded under superb conditions when the band was at its hottest. Also, Columbia has an unreleased album that he feels sure will come out once his MCA material is released.

"They (Columbia) will drag out whatever I've recorded for them except Electric Flag. I don't think they can use that any more unless they get 19¢ bins in record stores."

Meanwhile, he will continue to perform in the Bay Area with his own band as well as Nick Gravenites' band. Notwithstanding his admiration for The Tubes, the Sons of Champlin and Creedence Clearwater Revival, Bloomfield has never felt that the Bay Area was really a prolific music scene, even when it was really known for the "San Francisco Sound."

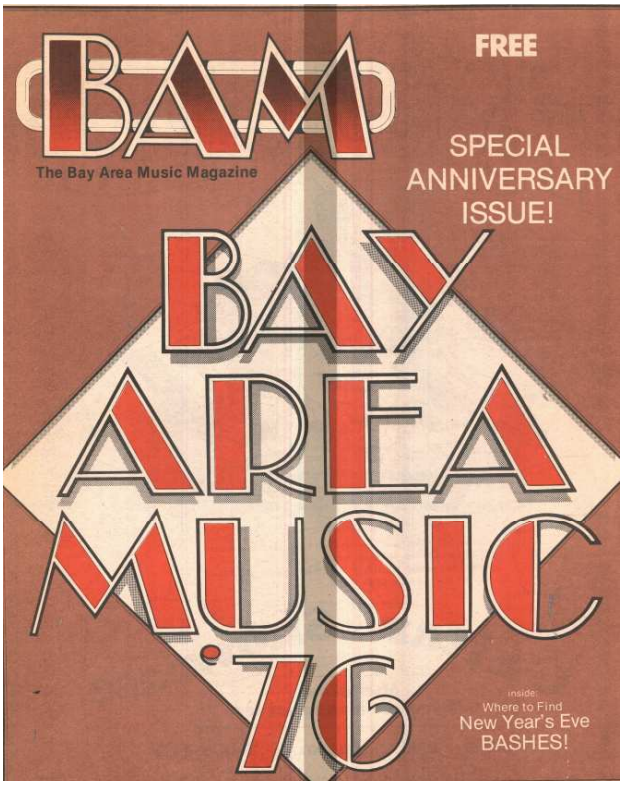
He explains: "There's no recording scene or big management scene here. There's a prolific club scene, and you could work from Santa Cruz to Sonoma and stay busy all your life. Guys like me who've got a name get the best gigs 'cause we've been out here the longest, but if you've got something to say, you'll get a gig.

"I had an interesting conversation once with some guys from a young band in front of the West Dakota Club in Berkeley. They wanted to know why guys like me wouldn't quit playing around here so they could get the gigs. I said, 'no, man, I've been working for a long time, and if I want to work where I live, you'll just have to get better than me and draw more people and then you'll get the gigs. It's yours then; you'll get the promo; you'll get the breaks.' In the meantime, they should just be opening acts.

"I've been playing music professionally for 18 years, and I have no sympathy for a new band making it without paying a whole lot of dues. It's fine if the stars are with them and they make it in a flash, but if they want to make it without paying dues . . . well, that's it."

*****

1976 December – BAM – Bay Area Music ´76 – Special Anniversary Issue (New Year) –
A free magazine A 2 pages article: Mike Bloomfield: I wanna be the best.
Reprint from the June issue. Also article on The Catalyst, Santa Cruz.



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1977. February 10 – Rolling Stone
Article “Backstage At The Creation” by Al Kooper with Ben Edmonds. 9 pages.
From Kooper’s book “Backstage Passes – Rock ‘n’ Roll Life in the Sixties”
published by Stein & Day 1977.

BACKSTAGE AT THE CREATION

BY AL KOOPER WITH BEN EDMONDS

Ed. Note: Behind the scenes, and later in front of them, Al Kooper was a key figure of Sixties rock & roll. At 15 a member of the Royal Teens (belatedly—he joined after "Short Shorts" became a hit), coauthor of "This Diamond Ring" and any number of Gene Pitney B-sides as a hanger-on in the Brill Building songwriting factories, Kooper was one of the first session players to move from anonymity to something approaching stardom. Later, he would form a pair of bands, the Blues Project and Blood, Sweat and Tears, which helped shape Seventies rock. In the interim, he was one of the original contributors to ROLLING STONE*'s Records section, and with Mike Bloomfield and Stephen Stills inaugurated the notion of the rock jam with "Super Session."*

As for the quality of Kooper's work, he participated in three of the most spectacular recordings of rock & roll history as organist—two-fingered or otherwise—on Bob Dylan's classic "Like a Rolling Stone" and guitarist and keyboard player on the monumental 'Blonde on Blonde,' and later as French horn player and cosavenger of the Rolling Stones' remarkable "You Can't Always Get What You Want." In these excerpts from Kooper's musical biography, 'Backstage Passes,' cowritten with Ben Edmonds, to be published this month by Stein & Day, he tells the behind-the-scenes story of each of those songs. It's the best inside look at the evolution of rock & roll we've seen in a long, long time.

IN 1965, BEING INvited to a Bob Dylan session was like getting backstage passes to the fourth day of creation. And, make no mistake about it, a formal invitation was absolutely requisite. There was no just-happening-to-be-in-the-neighborhood of Columbia Studios when Dylan was recording. Sessions for Dylan albums at that time might as well have been strategy meetings for the direction

Just after jamming: Al Kooper, (left) with Mike Bloomfield and album cover painter Norman Rockwell

running down all seven of my guitar licks over and over again. Despite my doodling at the piano, I was primarily a guitar player and, having gotten a fair amount of session work under my belt, had developed quite an inflated opinion of my dexterity on said instrument.

The session was called for two o'clock the next afternoon. Taking no chances, I arrived an hour early and well enough ahead of the crowd to establish my cover. I slipped into the studio with my guitar case, unpacked, tuned up, plugged in and sat there trying my hardest to look like I belonged. The other musicians, all people I knew from other sessions around town, slowly filtered in and gave no indication that anything was amiss. For all they knew, I could have received the same phone call they'd gotten. Tom Wilson hadn't arrived as yet, and he was the only one who could really blow the whistle on my little-ego drama. I was prepared to tell him I had misunderstood him and thought he had asked me to play on the session. All bases covered.

Suddenly Dylan exploded through the doorway, and in tow was this bizarre-looking guy carrying a Fender Telecaster guitar *without* a case. Which was weird, because it was the dead of winter and the guitar was all wet from the rain and snow. But he just shuffled over into the corner, wiped it off, plugged in and commenced to play some of the most incredible guitar I'd ever heard. That's all the Seven Lick Kid had to hear; I was in over my head. I anonymously unplugged, packed up and did my best to look like a reporter from *Sing Out!* magazine.

Tom Wilson made his entrance, too late, thank God, to catch my one-act abortion. I asked him who the guitar player was. "Oh, some friend of Dylan's from Chicago, named Mike Bloomfield. I never heard of him, but Bloomfield says he can play the tunes and Dylan says he's the best." That's how I made my introduction to a man who can still make me smile whenever he picks up a guitar.

The band quickly got down to business. They weren't too far into this long song Dylan had written before it was decided that the organ part would be better suited to piano. The sight of an empty seat stirred my ambitions once again; didn't matter that I knew next to nothing about playing a goddamn organ. In a flash I was on Tom Wilson, telling him that I had a great part for the song and please (oh God please) could I have a shot at it.

"Hey," he said, "you don't play the organ."

"Yeah, I do, and I got a good part, all the while racing my mind in overdrive to find anything that I could play at all.

Already adept at wading through my bullshit, Tom says, "I don't want to embarrass you, Al, I mean . . ." and was then distracted by some other studio obligation. Claiming victory by virtue of not having received a direct "no," I'm off to the organ.

Me and the organ. If the other guy hadn't left the damn thing turned on, my career as an organ player would have ended right there. I figured out as best I could how to bluff my way through while the rest of the band rehearsed one little section of the song. Then Wilson is saying, "Okay, let's try it again, roll the tape," and I'm on my own.

Check this out: there is no music to read. The song is over five minutes long. The band is so loud that I can't even hear the organ, and I'm not familiar with the instrument to begin with. But the tape is going, and that is *Bob fucking Dylan* over there singing, so this had better be me sitting here playing *something*. The best I could manage was to play kind of hesitantly by sight, feeling my way through the changes like a little kid fumbling in the dark for a light switch. After six minutes they'd gotten the first complete take of the day down, and all adjourned to the booth to hear it played back.

Thirty seconds into the second verse, Dylan motions towards Tom Wilson. "Turn the organ up," he orders.

"Hey, man," Tom says, "that cat's not an organ player." *Thanks, Tom.*

But Dylan isn't buying it. "Hey, now don't tell me who's an organ player and who's not. Just turn the organ up."

He actually liked what he heard!

At the conclusion of the playback, the entire booth applauded the soon-to-be-a-classic "Like a Rolling Stone," and Dylan acknowledged the tribute by turning his back and wandering into the studio for a go at another tune. I sat, filled in a straight chord every now and again. No other songs were gotten that day, but as everyone was filing out Dylan asked for my phone number—which was like Brigitte Bardot asking for the key to your hotel room—and invited me back the next day. I walked out of that studio realizing that I had actually lived my fantasy of the night before, but not exactly as I had planned it.

I returned to the studio the next day with considerably more confidence. My days as a daring organ commando were behind me, and that release of pressure allowed me to get down to figuring out what the hell I was doing sitting as an organ. The other keyboard player was Paul Griffin, who, with a secular black Baptist background, was probably the best studio keyboard cat in all of New York City and certainly the funkiest. I leaned in his direction heavily that day, borrowed a bass line here, a rhythm part there, and generally picked up a lot of basics and the beginning of a style that can be traced directly to his playing. It was the kind of situation where I would have copped from Liberace if he'd been sitting in that seat. (Thanks, Tom Wilson, for not hiring Liberace.)

We cut two things that day: "Tombstone Blues" and "Queen Jane Approximately." I was adequate. And elated. That was the last date on Dylan's recording schedule for a while and ended my contact with him—unless he planned to use the telephone number I'd given him.

PHOTOGRAPH FROM AL KOOPER COLLECTION

When Al was a session player, he knew the importance of cool.

The annual event of those years on the East Coast rock & roll scene was the Newport Folk Festival, held each July. It was more than a series of concerts and workshops; it was a place where musicians went to woodshed, meeting the best and boldest of their colleagues on a pastoral setting that had about it some inklings of magic. Here, Dylan had first come to prominence, singing with Joan Baez. And at the 1965 festival, he declared forever his independence from the structures of "folk." Once more, Kooper made the scene by accident.

When I arrived backstage that evening, Dylan came running over wearing this top hat and grabbed me in a bear hug.

"Al Kooper," he said, "how are you? We've been calling you for days. (I had been in Newport.) Good to see you," etc., etc., etc.

What he had in his mind was to put the electric sound of the recording sessions onstage at Newport. "Like a Rolling Stone" was blasting out of every transistor radio smuggled onto the festival grounds, and Dylan wanted to make the penetration blatant. This included my incompetent organ playing, which had suddenly become a publicly recognized trademark of the new Dylan sound.

The group Mike Bloomfield played with, the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, was debuting at the festival that year. So not only was Bloomfield available for duty, Dylan also copped the use of drummer Sam Lay and Jerome Arnold on bass. A friend of Bloomfield's, Barry Goldberg, was "recruited" to play piano (he begged for the chance). The night before the scheduled performance we rehearsed until dawn in one of those huge Newport mansions overlooking the ocean.

Our portion of the show opened with "Maggie's Farm" and concluded with "Like a Rolling Stone." In the middle of "Maggie's Farm," somebody fucked up and Sam Lay turned the beat around, which thoroughly confused everyone until the song mercifully stumbled to its conclusion. But "Like a Rolling Stone" was A-1 and we really got it across. Dylan came off and appeared to be satisfied, and people were yelling for more.

If you've read any accounts of that evening, chances are they centered on how Dylan was booed into submission and then returned for a tearful acoustic rendering of "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue." A romantic picture, maybe, but that's not the way I saw it. At the close of the set, Peter Yarrow (of Paul and Mary fame and the emcee for the evening) grabbed Dylan offstage.

"Hey," he said, "you just can't leave them like that. They want another one."

"But that's all we know," replied Dylan, motioning toward the band. "Well," says Yarrow, "go back out there with an acoustic guitar."

And he did. That's all there was to it. I was there.

By now, Kooper was a full-fledged member of Dylan's traveling Greenwich Village sideshow, a fabled but still largely untold fount of rock & roll lore. Although he was married and still lived in the semi-detached suburbia of Queens, in the neighborhood where he'd grown up with Paul Simon and Arthur Garfunkel, Kooper began spending more and more time "downtown" with Dylan, Bob Neuwirth and the rest of the gang. This is how it was —and how Kooper and Dylan came to go their separate ways, after some further improbable adventures back in Queens and on the West Coast.

Dylan would hold court at a back table

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KOOPER COLLECTION (LEFT)

DAVID GAHR (CENTER), ALICE COOPER (RIGHT, TWO)

Al, Mike Bloomfield, bassist Jerome Arnold and Dylan (left) at the 1965 Newport festival when Dylan rocked out the folk crowd with "Like a Rolling Stone" and "Maggie's Farm"; (top) with Dylan and Sir Douglas Sahm in 1966; Blues Project 2, circa 1965

at the Kettle of Fish, a seedy little bar on McDougall Street in the Village that was distinguished only by its musical clientele. Once the place was fairly full they'd lock the doors and Dylan would take over. Word that Dylan was inside circulated in the street, and people would jam up outside the window hoping to catch a glimpse of the action.

Dylan, as always, was buying the drinks. Neuwirth would carry the money, pay the bills and make all the necessary apologies. It was never very long before the room was on a collective drunk (except for yours truly, whose raging ulcer precluded anything stronger than milk). The cast of characters usually included Dylan, Neuwirth, Eric Andersen, Debby Green, Phil Ochs, David Blue, Dave Van Ronk, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Clarence Hood (who owned the Gaslite, a club next door), myself and Paul Rothchild (a staff producer at Elektra).

If Dylan got drunk enough, he'd select a target from among the assembled singer/songwriters, and then pick him apart like a cat toying with a wounded mouse—making fun of a person's lyrics, attire, or lack of humor was the gist of his verbal barrage. Dylan was so accomplished at this nasty little game, if he desired, he could push his victim to the brink of fisticuffs. It was all relative to how much alcohol was being consumed by the party of the first part, the party of the second part, or the party in general. When temperatures would threaten to shatter the room's emotional thermometer, it would be good ol' Neuwirth's job to step in and negotiate a temporary treaty over *another* bottle of rum. These nights would usually end with everyone carrying everyone home and Neuwirth paying a tab that was well into the hundreds.

Dylan maintained a fierce rivalry with his "children" (as *Life* magazine called them), although underlying his antagonism was a comprehensive awareness of their latest albums and career moves. Maybe he wanted to keep everyone on their toes, or perhaps he was just trying to stay awake.

Dylan's late-summer appearance at Forest Hills tennis stadium was almost an act of war; his folk-oriented fans mingled with rockers for the first time. Reams of type have been devoted to how that concert seemed from the crowd; this is the first look at how it felt on the stage.

The concert started off smoothly enough, with Dylan sailing through a well-paced acoustic set to the delight of the overflow crowd. At intermission, Dylan cleared the backstage area and called us into a huddle. "I don't know what it will be like out there. It's going to be some kind of carnival, and I want you all to know that up front. So just go out there and keep playing no matter how weird it gets." Yeah, well . . . sure.

Our instruments were pushed into place and we tuned quietly [Cont. on 65]

DAVID GAHR (CENTER); ALICE OCHS (RIGHT TWO)

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[*Cont. from 55*] in the darkness. Suddenly an ill-timed wind whipped through the stadium, dropping the temperature at least ten degrees in as many seconds. The crowd stirred at the sound of the tentative drum rolls and guitar tunings, an ominous rumble from the other side of the darkness.

The lights went up and we were into "Tombstone Blues" full force, but the audience was quiet. Too quiet. The wind churned around the stadium and blew Dylan's hair this way and that, as if reprimanding him for this electric sacrilege. The conclusion of the song was greeted with the boos all these kids had read so much about and probably felt obliged to deliver. Of course, the barrage was spiced with "Dylan, you scumbag!" "Get off the fucking stage!" and other subtle pleasantries characteristic of our generation.

Dylan ordered us to keep playing

Dylan didn't flinch. He just bulled his way straight through the hour-plus set. It seemed that even the hero-worshipers were unusually aggressive on this evening. They'd try and claw their way onto the stage to make contact with Dylan, and the police were sparing no tactic to keep them back. One kid was chased behind me by a cop, and as he flew by he hooked his leg on my stool, taking me with him as he went down. I was on my ass.

Three-quarters of the way through, Dylan stood at the piano to play "Ballad of a Thin Man," a song from the as-yet-unreleased *Highway 61* album. It had a quiet intro, and the kids persisted in yelling and booing all the way through it. Dylan commanded us to "Keep playing the intro over and over again until they shut up!" We played it for a good five times—*Doo do da da, do da de da*—over and over until they did, in fact, cool it. A great piece of theater. When they were finally quiet, Dylan sang the lyrics to them: "Something is happening here, but you don't know what it is, do you?"* It was almost as if he'd written the song knowing full well that the moment would come when he'd sing it to this crowd. It was lovely. We then segued into "Like a Rolling Stone," which was Number One on the charts that week. Everyone sang along and then booed.

Dylan pulled his customary vanishing trick, leaving Harvey and me to make our way out into the chilly Forest Hills night unaided. People recognizing our shirts from the stage reached out to grab us, and believe me, they could have had *anything* in mind. We eventually got out and stopped off at my apartment to shower before driving into New York for the postconcert party at Albert Grossman's apartment in Gramercy Park. Neither of us had the slightest clue as to what Dylan thought of the concert. All we knew was that we played what we were supposed to play, and that the sound had been real good.

We walked into Albert's apartment, and Dylan bounded across the room and hugged both of us. "It was fantastic," he said, "a real carnival and fantastic." He'd loved it!

The following weekend we were scheduled to play the Hollywood Bowl with the same repertoire. Not only had I never been to California, I'd never even seen the inside of an airplane. The band was supposed to make the journey in Grossman's private plane (the *Lodestar*), but I pleaded to fly commercially for my first flight ever.

I sat between Dylan and Neuwirth coast to coast, and they staged the best horror show they could dream up for my benefit. Every time the plane would dip or move the least bit awkwardly, they'd look at each other with blatantly pessimistic frowns and say, "This is the worst flight I've ever been on." Dylan would grip my arm and stammer, "I think this is the big dive, Al." And Neuwirth would cradle his head in his hands and whimper, "No, no, no." They'd be ringing for the stewardess every ten minutes, telling her I was very ill and could they please have another airsickness bag? This drama had me ready to pull the emergency latch until I looked around and saw everybody else

*

BACKSTAGE PASSES

on the plane calmly enjoying their cocktails and conversation.

While in L.A., me and Harvey shared a room at the Hollywood Sunset Hotel down the hall from Dylan's suite, which was the hub of activity for the week. We got there about two days before the concert, and I went the goggle-eyed hip-tourist route all over L.A., which was approaching the zenith of its glory in 1965. I went shopping and saw all the clothes that I'd ever wanted to wear. Incredible brightly colored shirts featuring big polka dots and floral patterns; the kind of mod look that had been imported from London to Los Angeles but hadn't hit New York yet. I immediately blew my entire wad on shirts.

One day a bunch of us were congregating in Dylan's room: Irwin and me, Michael J. Pollard, a few hangers-on and P.F. Sloan, who was the most blatant West Coast Dylan imitator. Dylan loved having himself surrounded by second-rate mirror images; it was sorta like giving them the Bad Housekeeping Seal of Approval. "Get P.F. Sloan," he'd scream. "Let's have P.F. Sloan up here."

Al, as member of Blues Project, '66

Dylan was in the midst of modeling a new suit he'd just purchased when the phone rang. It was obviously someone Bob didn't want to talk to, because he was trying to hang up almost as soon as he took the call. As he was talking, room service wheeled in an elaborate cart of sandwiches and desserts that Bob had ordered for everyone, and he grabbed a sandwich.

Now at this time it didn't particularly matter whether Dylan was lighting a cigarette, reading a book, or talking on the phone; he was the center of attention at all times. He tried to explain to the guy that he's got to hang up, that they just brought lunch in, but evidently the guy is holding on hard. Dylan nonchalantly takes the egg salad sandwich he's eating and starts grinding it into the mouthpiece of the phone, all the while explaining that it's lunchtime. The guy must have been getting the message, because everyone in the background was loudly in stitches. Dylan's parting shot was to pour his glass of milk into the phone as well, saying, "Well, so long, thanks for having lunch with us." Totally oblivious to the milk and mayonnaise all over his new suit, he just strolled into the other room to take a nap. End of audience.

Leaving Dylan, his wife and suburbia, Kooper moved to the Village and fell in with a gang of blues freaks, notably including Danny Kalb, Steve Katz and Tommy Flanders, then appearing at the Village Gate. When they decided to call themselves the Blues Project, they—along with Butterfield's amazing Chicago-based group which featured Mike Bloomfield — helped kick off the decade's first nationwide blues craze. But Dylan and Kooper kept in touch, as we shall see.

When I was in the Blues Project, I was given a sabbatical in early '66 to rejoin Dylan in the studio and assist in the recording of a new album. Bob Johnston, a Southerner, who was his producer at the time, suggested that Bob try cutting some of the album in Nashville with some of the best musicians the town had to offer. Bob agreed but stipulated that Robbie Robertson and myself join whatever cast was assembled. I had never been down South before and was not particularly looking forward to it due to various accounts I had perused in the papers. However, Johnston met us at the airport and had secured the services of one of Elvis' bodyguards for the duration of the visit just in case Nashville folk weren't "ready" for Dylan. Mr. Lamar Fike was introduced to us, and he spent the two weeks that we were there telling us what life was like with Elvis. Actually, Lamar was a great guy with a *nasty* sense of humor.

One day, with some time off, I ventured out of our protective web on a shopping expedition to Buckley's, the largest record store in town. I decided to make it on foot from the hotel, as it was a nice day and it was just a straight walk down the main drag about three-quarters of a mile from the hotel.

About halfway there, there's a bunch of kids hanging out on

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the corner looking for trouble or me, whichever came first, I thought to myself. They were about 18-19 years old, but real mean-looking; about three of 'em. I didn't even have what you would call long hair then; I actually looked straight. Had on black Beatle boots, black pants, shirt and tie for good measure and a black leather car coat. This was my basic uniform in that era.

I decide to cross the street so as not to even walk past their line of vision. I'm runnin' across the street to make the light and right off they're imitating my run as they spin off after me. I should've continued running, but I didn't know if it was early enough to commit myself to my paranoia. All of a sudden, there's a hand on my shoulder.

Now, it's midday in downtown Nashville, there's lots of people and traffic in the street and it's the main drag, but inherently, I know that if these guys start wasting me, nobody's gonna pay much attention, 'specially if they hear me say "Ow" with a Yankee accent. Also, in case you haven't met me, let me explain that I was never a contender in the Golden Gloves. I'm about six-foot-one and weigh about 145. In short, a meek, walking toothpick.

So this hand is on my shoulder spinning me around, and the reality is hitting me: if I don't nail the first guy first, I'll be going straight to Nashville General. Just as he's about to say something funny at the conclusion of the spin-around, I slam my fist into his groin. He hit the dirt groaning.

His friends, deciding that valor was the better part of punkdom, stood their ground, and it was sort of status quo for a second as we all turned into chickens. I started tear-assing down the boulevard looking for sanctuary and a telephone. About two or three blocks down, I found a well-populated bookstore and barreled into the phone booth. I called Al Grossman's (Dylan's manager's) room and told him what was happening and where I was. He said sit tight, they'd be there in a minute.

I hoped so, because here come the punks to the outside of the store. They spot me in the phone booth and set up guard outside the door, figuring I gotta go sometime. Trusting in Grossman, I edge out of the phone booth and pretend to browse around the bookstore. *Mistake.* In comes one heading right for me. I can see it all now: books flying, jail cells, death notices. Just as the guy enters the shop, here comes Lamar in a fat Caddy screeching to a halt in front of the shop. He jumps out of the car, spots me through the window, then casually strolls into the store. The kid heads right for me, and my adrenalin is at the bursting point. I grab him by his collar and say, "Look, you motherfucka, you and your friends get the fuck off my back or I'm gonna get MAD!"

He looks at me incredulously just as Lamar rounds the corner and pulls me off the punk saying, "Al, you better stop picking fights, I'm tired of bailing your ass outa jail every other day," and all the while we're edgin' outa the shop. The kids is still thinkin', what the fuck? as we dive into the Caddy and head back to the hotel, hysterical.

Spell it Al, not Alice—or else

The combination of Dylan, his current material, and the Nashville musicians was near-perfect. There was me and Robbie, Charlie McCoy, Joe South and Henry Strzelecki on bass; Wayne Moss, Charlie McCoy, Jerry Kennedy, Joe South on guitars; Hargus "Pig" Robbins on keyboards; and Kenny Buttrey on drums. They were extremely flattered to have Dylan in their midst and gave him every consideration they could. The janitor emptying ashtrays at the sessions turned out, in later years, to be a young struggling Kris Kristofferson.

We worked at Columbia Studios. Dylan had sketches of most of the songs, but he completed the bulk of the writing there in Nashville, most of it in the studio. When he felt like writing or rewriting, everyone would repair to the Ping-Pong tables in the canteen. Sometimes, in the case of "Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" or "Visions of Johanna," he would sit in there for five hours without coming out and just play the piano and scribble. He had a piano put in his hotel room and during the day I would sit and play the chords to a song he was working on while he tried different sets of lyrics to them. It was good 'cause I got the jump on the tunes and was able to teach it to the band that night without Dylan being bothered with that task. There were some little things about the sessions that were funny.

There was this keyboard player named Pig. He looked like your everyday plumber or executive (late thirties, scrubbed Wasp look) except he was blind. He was so unuptight about the situation that after a while you would forget it.

Dylan had this problem with him. He couldn't talk directly to him because he couldn't call this sweet guy Pig. So he would say to someone else (usually yours truly), ". . . tell the piano player to play an octave higher." And he would look in Pig's direction and sorta smile, 'cause that way he avoided calling him Pig.

The definitive Pig story is told by Bob Johnston. Seems that Pig and the boys tied one on one night after a late session, and they're driving home when this uncontrollable urge comes over the inebriated Pig.

"I wanna drive. You so-and-sos move over and let me navigate this Cadillac!"

His buddies, bein' drunker than Pig, pulled the car over and put Pig in the driver's seat. In a moment they were goin' down the highway with a blind driver and a car fulla drunk rednecks. The guy ridin' shotgun is saying, "A little to the left . . . good . . . uh, now a little to the right . . . a little faster . . ." and they're actually pulling it off until they see a red light flashin' behind 'em and the familiar siren of the Tennessee Highway Patrol. They get Pig to pull the car over, and that's where the story ends. The rest is left up to the listener's imagination, if he can think. Usually, he's laughing too hard.

One time I fell asleep on the soft carpet floor of the studio while Dylan was deep into writing. I was awakened by Dylan shaking me. All the musicians were sitting around me, instruments poised, waiting to record. "C'mon, Al, you're holding up the whole session. Everyone's waiting for ya! Hey, wake up!" Real embarrassing.

Another night I was sitting in

PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY NICHAMIN

Sonic Boom 11

BACKSTAGE PASSES

the control booth while Dylan was in the studio unmoving, writing again. Al Grossman had made a habit of pitching quarters into the soundproofed ceiling, and now everyone was doing it. I just knew when we left town, some engineer was gonna turn up a bass track all the way and all them fuckin' quarters was gonna rain down on the control room like a Las Vegas jackpot.

Anyway, me and Grossman and Johnston are pitchin' quarters, and this local newspaperman had somehow got in. He was in there about an hour and a half just staring at the motionless Dylan through the glass when he finally said, "Damn! What's he on, anyhow?"

Grossman, not wanting the facts to get distorted in this guy's potential scoop, tells him, "Columbia Records, sir." The guy is ushered out shortly thereafter.

Dylan was teachin' us a song one night when Johnston suggested it would sound great Salvation Army style. Dylan thought it over and said it might work. But where would we get horn players at this hour? "Not to worry," says Charlie McCoy, and grabs the phone. It's 4:30 a.m. when he makes the call. Now I am not exaggerating when I say that at 5 a.m. in walks a trombone player. He's cleanshaven, wearing a dark suit and tie, wide awake and eager to please . . . and . . . he's a helluva trombone player. He sat down and learned the song, they cut three takes, and at 5:30 he was out the door and gone.

Charlie McCoy blew my mind many times that trip, but my fondest memory was when we were recording "You Go Your Way I'll Go Mine." There was a little figure after each chorus that he wanted to put in on trumpet, but Dylan is not fond of overdubbing. It was a nice lick, too. Simple, but nice. Now Charlie was already playing bass on the tune. So we started recording and when that section came up, he picked up a trumpet in his right hand and played the part while he kept the bass going with his left hand without missing a lick in either hand. Dylan stopped in the middle of the take and just stared at him in awe. It's on the record with no overdubbing two takes later; bass and trumpet! This guy is everything great you ever heard about him. If it makes music, he can play it.

The credits are vague on the *Blonde on Blonde* album. Maybe I can fill in a few holes for the reader, Joe South is playing bass on "Visions of Johanna." He has a very special style of playing bass, sort of hillbilly funk. His unique guitar style is most discernible in the mix on "Memphis Blues Again." He and I have some nice organ-guitar tradeoffs in that one. Wayne Moss plays the cool guitar parts on "I Want You."

How can you say 'no' to the Stones?

The other amazing thing about cutting that album was the first-hand knowledge that you were making history. After I cut the *Highway 61* album, I heard those songs everywhere. I will probably hear them all my life, anywhere I go. They are instant classics because they are prime Dylan. Imagine how it felt playing on a session when, by virtue of the fact that you had already done it once, you knew that whatever you played would last *forever*. That's a heavy feeling and a heavy responsibility for a punk from Queens, New York. Thank you, Bob, for giving me that opportunity.

'Blonde on Blonde' was Kooper's last caper with Dylan. He went on to greater things with the Blues Project, then, when that band folded, helped organize the Monterey Pop Festival, and finally came home to form Blood, Sweat and Tears. But he was squeezed out of the group in a power play after their remarkable first album and, bored with session work, turned to a job as A&R man at Columbia Records, where his major projects included the "Super Session" LPs, first with Bloomfield and Stills, then with Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop, Butterfield's other former guitarist. He also recorded several solo albums. Then he decided to take a vacation . . . and walked straight into the arms of the Rolling Stones.

Around the time I finished the *Line Adventures* album, I was feeling real overworked and was sick of being in a studio day after day. I called close friend Denny Cordell, producer of Joe Cocker, Procol Harum and the legendary Move, who lived in London. "I wanna come over for awhile to rest from the studio. Pick us up at the airport and don't tell a soul that we're coming. It's escape time!"

Denny is an incredible character and deserves a chapter all his own, but that's another book in another place. So he meets me and my wife, Joanie, at the airport. How was the flight, blah, blah, blah. He said that the Stones' office had called him and did I feel like playing a few sessions with them? Oh, no. Not the studio again. I mean, it's really an honor and all that, but why did Raquel Welch wait until I fucked every chick in town before she snuck up to my room, if you catch my drift.

We got dropped at our hotel and just crashed out from the flight the first day. How did they know I was coming to town, I wondered. So the next day we're shopping on Kings Road and we bump into Brian Jones in a shirt store. "Are you gonna play the sessions, Al?" *How can you say no to these people?*

They wanted me for two sessions. I decided to do one and if it was really fun rock on; if it wasn't groovy, I'd get an ulcer attack the next night. I think the reason they called me was that their regular keyboard player was in the States at the time (Nicky Hopkins). As usual I got to the studio early. Charlie and Bill arrived next. I had met them before with Dylan. First-rate nonsense nice guys. It was good to see them again. I was sitting at the organ sort of nervously doodling around till everyone was there but Mick and Keith. Jimmy Miller, an American, was the producer. We exchanged amenities.

Just then Mick and Keith came roaring in the door. Mick is wearing a gorilla coat, and Keith's got this sort of Tyrolean hat with a real long feather in it. It was gonna be party time, and they were the party from the moment they arrived. Everyone sat around on the floor with either an acoustic guitar or a percussion instrument, and Mick and Keith played the song they wanted to record until everyone had the chord changes and the rhythm accents. There was a conga player there who could play congas and roll huge hash joints without missing a lick. It was decided I would play piano on the basic track and overdub organ later.

I got into this groove I had heard on an Etta James record of "I Got You Babe" that really fit their song well. Keith picked up on it right away and played a nice guitar part that meshed right with it. While they were getting the sounds they wanted on the instruments, Jimmy Miller was telling Charlie a certain accent he thought would do the song up. Charlie just couldn't seem to get the part and stepped down unhappily to take a break. Jimmy Miller sat down at the drums and remained there playing drums on the take! Charlie was real dejected. Mick and Keith played acoustic guitars, I played piano, Bill on bass, and Brian Jones lay on his belly in the corner reading an article on botany through the whole proceedings.

When a proper take was gotten, Keith overdubbed an electric part and I overdubbed the organ. After about four hours of recording, two men showed up with long folding tables and set up a veritable beggars' banquet with rack of lamb, curries, vegetables, rices, salads, a large selection of wines and lots of different desserts. Quite a change from a cheeseburger break in the States. I was so full after all that, I almost fucked up the organ part. I had a great time playing and I was treated real nicely, so I was actually looking forward to the next evening's session.

The song we recorded the first night was "You Can't Always Get What You Want," which later appeared on the *Let It Bleed* album and was also the flip side of the single, "Honky Tonk Woman." Almost nine months after that session, an eight-track master of the song arrived at my office one day at CBS. There was a note which said: *Dear Al, you once mentioned you could put some great horn parts on this. Well go ahead and do it and send us the tape back. Love, Mick.*

What a memory that Jagger has. I wrote out a horn chart, leaving a spot in the intro where I could play a French horn solo. The intro itself took me three hours to get 'cause I'm not the world's greatest French horn player, and I wanted to sound like I was. I could never have accomplished this at all without the tutelage of one of the great French horn players — Ray Alonge. Thanx again, Ray. Then I put the rest of the horns on with studio cats. It was a bad night in the studio for me, and the part didn't come out nearly as good as I thought it might. I crossed my fingers and sent Mick back his tape. A year later it came out, and they had ditched all the horn parts except my little French horn intro. It sounded fantastic on the radio, you could hear the piano and the organ, and they actually gave me credit on the single. Nice guys in spite of their image. (Wot image, mate?)

The next night we cut a track from the film Jagger was currently working on, *Performance*. The song was called "Memo from Turner," but was not the version used in the film or on the soundtrack album. I believe it was issued on a later London album of outtakes. I played one other time with them a few years later at a birthday party for Keith at Olympic Studios in London. They were working on the *Sticky Fingers* album. After the party, they cleared away the debris and set up to record. They cajoled Eric Clapton, myself and Bobby Keyes to join them in a previously unheard tune called "Brown Sugar." George Harrison, who was among the partygoers, was invited to play but declined. I read somewhere in an interview with Keith that it came out great and that they would release it someday, but the version on *Sticky Fingers* is another one entirely. I must take this opportunity to say that over the years, the Stones have always been honorable, great people to hang out with, and the best people to play after-hours music with.

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1977 March – Guitar Player.
Interview with Harvey Brooks by Dave Helland. 3 pages.

*****

1977. August – Ballroom Blitz #21.
Article on The Chicago Loop by Mike McDowell. 1 page.

*****

1978 April – International Musicians and recording world.
Interview by Steve Rosen "The Bloomfield File".

*****

1979 April – Guitar Player.
Article "Barroom scholar of the blues" by Tom Wheeler" 14 pages. Nice pictures.

Barroom Scholar of the Blues

Michael Bloomfield

By Tom Wheeler

MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD'S LEGEND won't go away. Though he is passionately committed to discovering, dusting off, and reinterpreting the dozens of musics in virtually every corner of America's post-Civil War folk heritage, his audiences are often unaware of that fact, or are more interested in hearing him recreate the sounds of the records that made him one of the world's preeminent blues-rock guitar superstars more than a decade ago, albums such as *Super Session* (with singer/keyboardist/producer Al Kooper and guitarist Stephen Stills), and LPs recorded by Bloomfield's various groups, including the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and the Electric Flag [see the two-part Bloomfield interview in *GP*'s June and August '71 issues].

"It's a real problem, a *big* one," he explains. "The records I have recorded in the last four years or so are very poorly distributed, or if they are well distributed there are no print ads, or the company doesn't have enough money to promote them the way I'd like them to." These records include *Analine, Count Talent And The Originals, Michael Bloomfield,* and an album produced by *Guitar Player* and nominated for a Grammy in 1977, *If You Love These Blues, Play 'Em As You Please*.

"On a recent Canadian tour," Mike continues, "I talked to hundreds of people, and only *two* had heard of those records. This is the bane of my existence, because a lot of times people come to see something from ten years ago—*twelve* years ago—they're coming to see *Super Session*, the Flag, I don't know what. They're coming to see Butterfield or whatever. It's because they aren't aware of the more recent stuff. I always make a disclaimer. I say, now listen, you're not going to hear what you heard ten years ago, although you might hear bits and fragments of it. If I could recreate it, I would. I wouldn't mind it. But I hope that you will take it for what it is. Try to remove your prejudgment, and take it for what it is. If you like it, great; if you don't. . . ."

In the eyes of the late-'60s record-buying public, Mike Bloomfield was tall in the saddle. After all, he was an onstage accomplice The Day Dylan Went Electric at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, and after several albums and tours with various bands he turned on thousands of guitar players and probably millions of other fans to Chicago-style electric blues.

Unlike the music of Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton, whose blues roots were one step removed and sometimes obscured by the smoke and sparks of the acid-rock milieu, Bloomfield's blues were unadorned, accessible, assimilable. His guitar technique churned with such soulfulness that he broke a color line of sorts, demonstrating a blues sensibility uncommon among white instrumentalists and earning respect from the sacred heroes of his youth. "Without a guitar," he once said, "I'm a poet with no hands."

For the most part Bloomfield shunned the conspicuous hallmarks of hot-licks, '60s-style electric guitar—distortion, feedback, and special effects—and instead, like the purist that he is, chose a bare-knuckles, plug-in-and-blow approach that continued a tradition discovered and embraced in the blues clubs of Chicago's seamy South Side. His consummate skill as a string bender (plus a fascination for the microtonal capabilities provided by bending) allowed him to extract the blue nuances of pitch. His dynamic pick attack, natural sustain, lyrical tone, and savory vibrato combined to infuse his art with a street eloquence, and his spontaneous but purposefully directed solos were charged with plenty of tension/release and call-and-response, comparing favorably with the best of the high-drama blues heavyweights like Albert King. In other words, as Michael himself might say of a favorite guitarist, he played his ass off.

In recent years he has devoted more time to acoustic music, and his popularity among guitar players remains high. For example, he makes regular appearances in the winners' circle of *Guitar Player*'s Readers Poll. He has taken first place not just in one category but in two: In 1976 he won Best Electric Blues, and last year he won Best Acoustic Blues while concurrently placing fifth in the Electric Blues division. Additional honors in various categories since 1972 include two second places, two thirds, and a fifth.

Michael's personal quirks reveal contrasts, though not inconsistencies. For example, when it comes to worshipping Ray Charles, B.B. King, or his other blues heroes, he is an idolator to the core (or, as he puts it, to the tits). And yet during the 1960s he never related to being the star that he was, and in fact—as he discusses in the following interview—he considers popular hero worship to be potentially detrimental, perhaps even vaguely immoral. He is much more interested in current work than past glories. He played guitar on Dylan's "Like A Rolling Stone" and on the *Highway 61 Revisited* LP [Columbia, PC 9189]—both seminal recordings monumentalized by pop historians—and yet in the June '71 *GP* interview he referred to the latter as "that album *Highway 61* or whatever it's called."

Michael's roomy, single-level house is jammed with the tools and accoutrements of a hardworking performer and a music lover—dusty guitars with grime-caked strings, a Fender Twin in the hall, another in the kitchen, stacks of jacketless albums, photos of musicians and other friends, tacked-up clippings, an inexpensive stereo that sometimes works—but there are no rock-star trappings, no pretenses.

Bloomfield's musical credentials are the real thing. He has taught musicology at Stanford University. He is a blues historian, a curator of sorts. He loves music for its own sake. And yet he has participated in commercial ventures which he describes below as "amazing scams, filthy lucre," one of which was the historic *Super Session*. Another contrast: Even though Mike's choices of instruments helped ignite popular rages the world over—for Telecasters (during his Butterfield days) and especially for Les Pauls, both gold-tops and sunbursts—he is not equipment-oriented at all in the materialist sense. His guitars are there to be played—and played *hard* (abused, some would charge)—not to be ogled, coveted, bragged about, or traded like so many baseball cards. Despite his influence as a trendsetter, Michael, a longtime member of *Guitar Player*'s Advisory Board, said in the September 1971 issue that, "I really don't know the major shortcomings of today's guitars, as I'm out of touch."

Mike, 35, lives atop a steep hill in Mill Valley, just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco, and he seldom leaves; the

Continued on next page

Michael at home with his Kay archtop and (back, L–R): Stratocaster, custom cutaway acoustic, Telecaster, mandolin; (front): Hilo Hawaiian, and student guitar.

less he tours, the better he likes it. He never made much money on the road with previous bands, and although he'd like to reach people all over the country who want to see him, he cannot tour very profitably without a hit single. Even if he could, he wouldn't hit the road very often anyway. Away from home he is an almost hopeless insomniac, a self-described displaced person. He once checked into Stanford's sleep clinic, where optimistic doctors promised to help. They wired him up to machines and hunkered down, waiting from him to fall asleep. He didn't. He stayed awake almost all of the time, occasionally lapsing into what's known as a hypnogogic state but never experiencing real sleep. After 14 days the doctors, now defeated and depressed, threw up their hands, advised him never to travel, and gave him a lifetime prescription for unlimited downers. When he's home in Mill Valley, though, he's OK. Sleeps great.

Over the past few years one of Mike's primary interests and sources of income has been the scoring of films, including *The Trip, Medium Cool* (photographed by his cousin, Oscar-winner Haskell Wexler), *Steelyard Blues*, Andy Warhol's *Bad*, and a wad of porno movies including *Sodom And Gomorrah* and the Mitchell brothers' *Ultra-Core* series. Michael plays northern California clubs, and income from these dates, movie scores, records, and songwriting supports him comfortably, though not luxuriously.

Mike Bloomfield is an especially animate interviewee. He'll talk at length to almost anyone who cares about music, and his conversations bulge with vivid anecdotes about hundreds of figures (from musical Americana. He is both colorful and quotable ("Heroin gave me pimples"). He is a well-read, thoughtful, and serious student, and yet his eye still has the gleam, his mouth the grin, of a kid who would not only dare to show his young fat white face in a South Side club, but who would also have the gall to practically force himself into an onstage jam alongside the baddest guitarslinger in town.

In the following interview Mike recounts how young players who learned at his feet showed up at his house one day and so moved him that he made an on-the-spot decision to forsake dope and return to serious guitar playing, and he talks about his frustrations and successes in the record business, his recent LPs, his initiation into Chicago blues, his playing techniques and equipment, his participation in (and rejection of) various marketing scams, how he views his legend, and how he came to recognize his personal mission as a performer/musicologist.

* * * *

ARE YOUR AUDIENCES sometimes surprised to see Michael Bloomfield the fingerpicker, the acoustic guitarist, the solo performer?

Yes, sometimes they are. There are certain places where they know me and they come to hear me play the solo thing, but at most gigs I'll get someone out there who screams, "*Super Session.*" When someone yells that I really can't imagine what's going on in his mind. I mean, here's a guy who's sitting up there onstage alone, fingerpicking—how's he going to do it? Where's the organ going to come from? The horns? What are you supposed to do, man [laughs], play the changes or something? Play the solo?

That's what they know, that's "Michael Bloomfield."

I know. I understand it. I swear, I remember when I was at a certain age I'd just want to hear the solo or something myself.

During the '60s, were you stimulated by all the attention?

Well, I don't need ego fixes. I'm sort of embarrassed by adulation. As much as anyone else, I enjoy energy transference. Like at its highest form I guess you would see it in a church, where you have a good preacher who goes outs, and the audience has orgasms, and they have to carry out the big fat women over the heads of the crowd. That's all well and good, but I am just not a compulsive junkie for mass ego glut. [Reggae singer] Bob Marley explained to me that he found it emasculating and demeaning to play in front of people sometimes. By saying that it was emasculating he didn't mean that it was feminine or anything, just that it was depersonalizing. It takes away some of your personal store of self, because the audience doesn't know who you are, and you're exhibiting some of your innards in front of strange people. Playing in front of strangers leads to idolatry, and idolatry is dangerous because the audience has a preconception of you even though you cannot get a conception of them, really. You have to look upon them as a herd. Every time I get together with anyone, I try to break it down, quickly, this herd situation.

So that the other person does not look at you as a fixed image, an inflexible symbol?

Yes, exactly, so that they are not experiencing just a face on a record cover that maybe they smoked their first dope to. In-

Michael at San Francisco Blues Festival, 1976.

Playing slide in a San Francisco club, '77.

stead, they're talking to me, a person, doing what I do now. People resent it sometimes when we move on and we don't fit their preconceptions. I'm the same way, really I am, I'm an idolator to the tits, man. When I go to see somebody, I want to see them onstage the way I see them in my mind. I want to see B.B. with a processed hairdo.

But you didn't relate to being a rock star yourself?

No, I didn't, not at all, even when it was happening. I couldn't even conceive of myself as a rock star. I had no idea it was happening. I was into researching old forms of music and belonging to folklore societies and meeting old players and going to folk festivals. I'd been playing bluegrass and country blues for years, and I just never pictured myself as a big electric guitar hero. I would buy someone else's record and picture them as a rock star, but I could never see it in myself.

You didn't see yourself as the American Eric Clapton?

No, never. Clapton, I thought, now *here's* a guy, here's a *rock star*. Boy, did he play. I thought, if I could only do what he could do. I thought that he had taken the blues just absolutely as far as it could go. And when Hendrix came along I just wanted to burn the guitar [Bloomfield expresses his views of Jimi's playing in detail in *GP*'s Sept. '75 Jimi Hendrix special issue]. I'm sure Eric felt the same way. So I didn't relate to being a rock star at all. I read a lot of stuff about all that, but it wasn't real for me. All of those social implications and ramifications of a rock star trip—I was never into it.

How does that happen? How can an artist's perception of himself be so different from the public's perception?

A lot of it is due to the record business. Never underestimate a good merchandiser. I've been involved in some pretty amazing scams. I'll give you an example: One scam was a band I was in just a few years ago called KGB, named after the Russian secret service. Barry Goldberg, a musician whom I have known all my life, was a genius for all sorts of scam/hustle things. One of them was the resurrection of the Electric Flag, the debacle of debacles. Anyway, Barry knew a guy who managed two giant superstars. Well, to give you some background, during this time—it was just a few years ago—I was going through an intense period of musical self-awareness. I knew what I wanted to do. All of my diverse inputs were sort of coming together and solidifying. It was coming out in the way I wrote prose, painted pictures—the same aesthetic value was brought to everything, and I thought that it was valid.

Were you influenced at this time by anyone in particular?

A lot of things influenced my confidence in the worth, the value, of all this. Ry Cooder [see *GP*, Mar. '71] is an example. I thought, here is a man who had his eye on a certain sparrow, making record after record and constantly refining his diamond, so to speak. Not just Ry, but there were many other artists—Willie Nelson, and certain poets and novelists—and I realized that everything was coming together for me in an artistic sense. I was developing a set of Bloomfield criteria. I realized that I have a way of seeing the world, and everything is filtered through this certain aesthetic mechanism. It was a pure visceral thing. Well, right when I was going through all of this incredibly important self-realization, Barry Goldberg took me to see this manager friend of his, and the guy looked across the table and said, "Boys, let's put a *supergroup* together!"

What was your response?

I told him he was crazy. Al Kooper invented the term—supergroup, super session. It was a pure scam. It was filthy lucre. It had nothing to do with an affinity for playing with each other. Just a name, a marketable name, like Fruit Loops. So I said to this manager, can you understand me, can you grok it, does it go through your brain what I'm saying to you, what I'm going through, what I'm going to do in terms of art and music?

What did he say?

He said, "Let's put a *supergroup* together!" This manager was not a crass guy, just a businessman. Nobody knew who the guys were in the band that Barry and I had been playing with previously, so the manager said that we needed *names*. He said to me, "Look, man, we've got Rick Grech to play bass in this new band. We've got a *name* drummer, Carmine Appice." I told him that I wasn't interested in playing with these guys. "Are you crazy?" I said. But he said, "We'll clean up."

Did the band members get along?

Yes, we got along great, we liked each other, but artistically it was a terrible experience. I couldn't sleep, I had moved down to L.A., I took my son out of school—blew the kid's mind. We were down there living in L.A. It was horrible.

How was the band marketed?

Well, the first thing we had to do was to get a record company. So we went to Hollywood to showcase for record executives. It was like *Roots* [laughs]. We were up on the auction block: "This is a *supergroup*, people! This is *rucka rucka* from *humma humma*." All these execs who came to see us looked the same: pinky ring, leisure suit, shirt open to the tits, fabulous complexions, and blow-dried hair. Also, some real cigar-stub guys: "Hey, Mike! I've been following your career ever since. . . what was that group you were with? You were with *Bloomfield*, weren't you?" One word I heard over and over was "bankable." We were a product, we were hula hoops, we were skateboards. We got a record deal, though. It was with MCA.

How did that happen?

Well, there are all sorts of executives in the record business. On the one hand you've got people like John Hammond Sr., Jerry Wexler, Lou Adler, Clive Davis, Ahmet Ertegun—these people have aesthetic values. They know what they want. They are mold-

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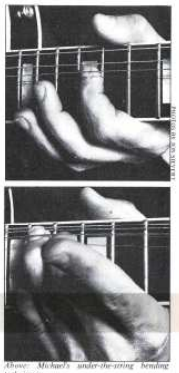
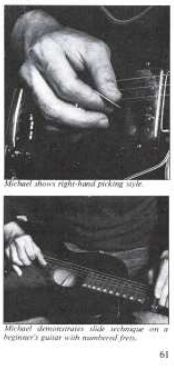


Above: Michael's under-the-string bending techniques.



Michael shows right-hand picking style.

Michael demonstrates slide technique on a beginner's guitar with numbered frets.

MIKE BLOOMFIELD

Continued from page 17

and I know where I'm going. But a lot of guys are doing that and just jerking their strings around. Like I know where I'm going when I'm bending. If there are seven frets, that means there are seven half steps and there are seven half-half steps, that's fourteen possible notes you can find within seven frets. And if you have a good enough ear, like Ravi Shankar or Jimi Hendrix, there are 21 steps within those seven frets. Like Jimi was just a super expert at that type of bending and he would use a wang bar vibrato too, you know, to really get it. He would hear where he was going, he just wasn't bending out in space somewhere. He would be bending to a certain place. And that's quite important for me and my playing style. Playing across instead of playing up and down the fingerboard. It's more vocal. The voice works like that. It bends like that. Your voice is like an instrument that you can just raise or lower with all those intervals or little spaces in between. And your guitar will begin to sound more vocal if you play like that.

GP: How did you develop your speed? Did you have any exercises you worked through?

MB: I just got it through jigging. I used to be faster when I was younger, when I was around 22. One thing is that your hands have to be equally matched in speed. Like some guys have a very fast picking hand and a not so fast fingering hand. To play fast, your mind has to be one step ahead of your hands, because then you're not only playing fast but intelligently. You're thinking as you go along. All the things like speed and the way of bending, before you can even play good these things have to be pastrema. That's got to be understood. It's like a boxer who is contending for a championship. You've got to assume he knows how to box. You've got to assume that he has done his training and is not just going to go out like a drunk brawler, swinging with both hands like an idiot. He's got to be out-duking the other guys too. So really, the essence of the music is that you have the melody down.

GP: When you view the fingerboard, do you view it in terms of scales or individual notes in modes?

MB: When I'm really into it, ideally, I know where all the notes are and I view it as scales, meaning runs and meaning licks. I view it as a pure melodic thing and I know what every note is going to sound like. Then, when I'm not into it, I view it strictly as scales. You see, every note relates to another in some way, so I can play every note on the guitar and still be in the key of Fm.

GP: You do that micro-tonally all in the same key?

MB: Yeah. Even if you're playing in the key of Fm, you can also be playing in the key of C, the key of G, the key of Bb, key of Eb. All these keys relate to Fm in a way, and a lot of the notes you use as passing notes. There are names for this. There's the mixolydian mode, there's a this and that mode. I don't know all the names, but they're there. Sometimes I look at the fingerboard that way. I know that when I'm in Gm, that I'm in such and such a mode and that I can play in all these different keys and yet it will all fit with Gm, you know. And when I'm at my best, I mean in the sense of pure melody, I'm not thinking that way. I just know where all the notes are and all the little micro-tones and where all of them fit in relation to the mode, which is mostly, I guess, how a good sitarist plays.

GP: What in a song makes you play high on the fingerboard, like on a lead?

MB: Highness can usually be equated with intensity. It usually has been in music. And some of the greatest solos in the world have been with the horn players shrieking up, playing an octave above where they usually play, kind of falsetto notes. You know, like in Gospel music, when they peak the singers. It's musical expression when you start screaming octaves above your normal voice. Like when Ray Charles is screaming really high. So I'll go up high. . .

GP: . . .as just a climax for you?

MB: Right. But sometimes I'll just use high notes as a passing thing to get to a low note. I start high and drop down with a run to get the contrast, and because it's a pleasant melodic swoop. But I usually don't think of it in terms that way. Except when I'm doing things that go a little bit higher, and then a little bit higher, just a little bit higher. And then I think of it as a high lick. But that's like if I'm playing that kind of music, like a blues song, where a high note won't necessarily mean a climactic thing. It might just mean that something might be juxtaposed against a low note or a low series of notes. But I do like to go from high to low a lot. The reason is that I like to get all over that neck and then settle down in one place and just fool around with one little median spot for a while, and then back and forth or up and down the fingerboard again. It depends on where I'm at. There is just so much you can do. My God, man, so many people don't know the value of *one* note. And then the space from just one note to another note. Like from C to D, that's a whole step and there is just so *much* you can do. You know, so many kids don't have any idea or don't concentrate on attack. A lot of things like wah-wah pedals and fuzz tones take the place of attack and yet they can be used to enhance your attack. But like the hitting of the note, the loudness, the softness, the intonation, the vibrato you put on it, whether your vibrato is going vertically across the fingerboard or whether your vibrato is going horizontally up and down the fingerboard like a classical player. These all are extremely important things. And you can get a great amount of beauty out of one note, you know. Or just three notes, just beautifully played, giving them their full value. Or like starting a note very softly and increasing your volume as you get to the peak of the run, or starting it loud and getting softer in the middle and louder toward the end.

GP: Do you use a volume pedal, or is it all by hands?

MB: No, It's all to the hands. You've got to learn to do it all with your hands. It's like the horn player who has to learn to play fast and soft with his breath, using breath control just like a singer. A good singer can sing real high and still not sing loud. Like most of the time to sing high, the singer has to sing loud to stretch his voice. Well, a good singer can sing as soft as he likes and as high as he likes too. And it's the same thing with the guitar player. Control, you've just got to have it.

GP: Do you ever use a fuzz or a wah?

MB: I don't use any of those for my own music. But on some occasions, like I was doing soul sessions with Fantasy Records, they said use a wah. The best fuzz tone is a thing called a Fuzz Face and the best wah-wah is a combination of a fuzz tone and a wah-wah. I found it to be very, very satisfactory. I like the wah-wah sound, but I've never heard anyone play it as adroitly as Hendrix. For my personal thing, if I were to play a wah I would try to sound like the old trumpet players.

GP: Like with a plumber's helper. Who are some of the trumpeters you would like to imitate as far as wah sound?

MB: Well, to play like Cootie Williams, a very famous trumpeter with Duke

MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD

Continued from page 80

picks. But on a regular guitar, I can't get agile enough if I'm wearing those things. For flatpicks, I like the really hard kind, a Fender hard. Actually, I hardly use a flatpick when I'm playing electric. I used to use one, but lately I've just been putting it in my mouth, and I leave it there. I find that I get a much funkier blues sound with my thumb or my nail. The strings I use are the Fender Rock And Roll set.

Do you lose speed by forgoing a flatpick?

Yes, I'll never be as fast with my fingers as I am with a pick, but the tone is worth it.

How do you bend so far without the other strings getting in the way?

You bend underneath the other strings [see photos, p. 61]. That's the way I do it.

What sort of material do you do on solo gigs?

Boy, I know so many songs—anything I can think of. There's no planned-out set; you won't find a little list taped to the side of my guitar or anything. I play whatever comes to mind. I'll do "Kickin' The Gong Around," which is a Hoagy Carmichael tune, "Willie The Weeper," which is from around 1910—it's about an opium addict—also "Frankie And Johnnie," "Shine On Harvest Moon," "Some Of These Days," which is a Sophie Tucker song, plus I'll do blues of all sorts—endless varieties, either original blues or classic blues—and hillbilly songs, from as current as George Jones's "Bartender Blues" to as old as they come. I do "Deep In The Heart Of Texas"—I'll do *anything*, not to mention rock and roll. Sometimes I'll just get on the piano and play all night, maybe a medley of Fats Domino, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Ray Charles.

Are there certain things that dictate the set's structure as you go along?

Yes. I try to get as loose an ambience as I can. Like one key, one sonority, will lead me into something else, or the speed of the song, the tempo, may sensibly flow into something else. I try to keep moods going, like a boogie mood—I'll try to keep it going for as long as it naturally sustains itself. If the audience is sort of forcing me to play, by clapping along or whatever they do, then I'm going to stop the mood and change it to something where

Continued on page 84

MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD

Continued from page 82

they're going to have to listen.

Do you perform any instrumentals?

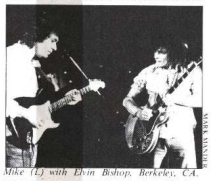
Sure. I'll do "Somewhere Over The Rainbow," "Maria Elena," "Danny Boy"—anything that occurs to me right at the time. I don't plan it at all. If I plan it, then I'll think about it all day, and it'll take away some of the spontaneity. I've never done the solo thing in front of a whole lot of people, but I'd like a chance to do that. I'd like to open for someone in front of a big audience. I'll open for anybody, man—if they come there to see *Devo*, I don't care—I'll be glad just to sit and play for them. I'm not intimidated by the fact that the whole audience isn't made up of stone Bloomfield heads. I'll still run through a bunch of different kinds of music.

Aside from history and folklore, how do all of these many musical forms come together for you? Is there a common thread, some basis for artistic integration?

I know what you're talking about; yes, there's a way in which I relate to all of these blues and folk forms. There's sort of a macrocosmic integration, a general artistic influence on me. I like simple sonorities. I have no present interest in spaced-out electric stuff; I admire it, but it doesn't tug at my heart. I like simpler things. I am a musicologist by bent. I am rooted in American music of all sorts—Cajun, Mexican, all the jazz players up to Django Reinhardt, like Teddy Bunn and Eddie Lang, plus all the blues and folk forms, music you play on all the fretted instruments.

And they all influence what you're trying to do now?

Yes. I began to realize some time ago that if all of these many hybrids could flow through me, then that would be what I was looking for. I wanted to innovate, rather than imitate, and yet I was doing old material. To innovate, you have to bring enough of yourself to the reinterpretive process, so that imitation becomes innovation. As Elvis



Mike (L) with Elvin Bishop, Berkeley, CA.

tried to sound like the Ink Spots or Big Boy Crudup or various blues singers, he ended up sounding like Presley.

Do you see yourself as a musical caretaker of sorts?

Well, a lot of these songs are dying. I don't know many people our age—even black people—who play blues or care about blues. Where are the young bluesmen? Freddie King's dead. Magic Sam's dead. I have some black friends who are music teachers and folklorists, and *I'm* teaching *them*. Culturally it's so weird, a Jew teaching a black about about blues. I would like to help keep those forms alive, so that people will know: This is how America played. ■

A Selected Bloomfield Discography

Solo albums: *Analine*, Takoma, 1059; *Michael Bloomfield*, Takoma, 1063; *Count Talent & The Originals*, Clouds (dist. by TK), 8805; *If You Love These Blues, Play 'Em As You Please* (Guitar Player Records, out of print). **With the Paul Butterfield Blues Band** (on Elektra): *Paul Butterfield Blues Band*, 7294; *East-West*, 7315; *Golden Butter*, 7E-2005. **With the Electric Flag** (on Columbia): *Long Time Coming*, CS 9597; *Best Of The Electric Flag*, C-30422. **With others:** Al Kooper, Stephen Stills, *Super Session*, Columbia, CS-9701; Janis Joplin, "One Good Man," *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again, Mama!*, Columbia, PC 9913; Bob Dylan, *Highway 61 Revisited*, Columbia, PC 9189; Muddy Waters and various blues artists, *Fathers & Sons*, Chess, 2CH 5033; John Paul Hammond, Dr. John, *Triumvirate*, Columbia, C-32172; various artists, *Live At Bill Graham's Fillmore West*, Columbia, CS 9893; Al Kooper, *Live Adventures Of Mike Bloomfield & Al Kooper*, Columbia, PG-6.

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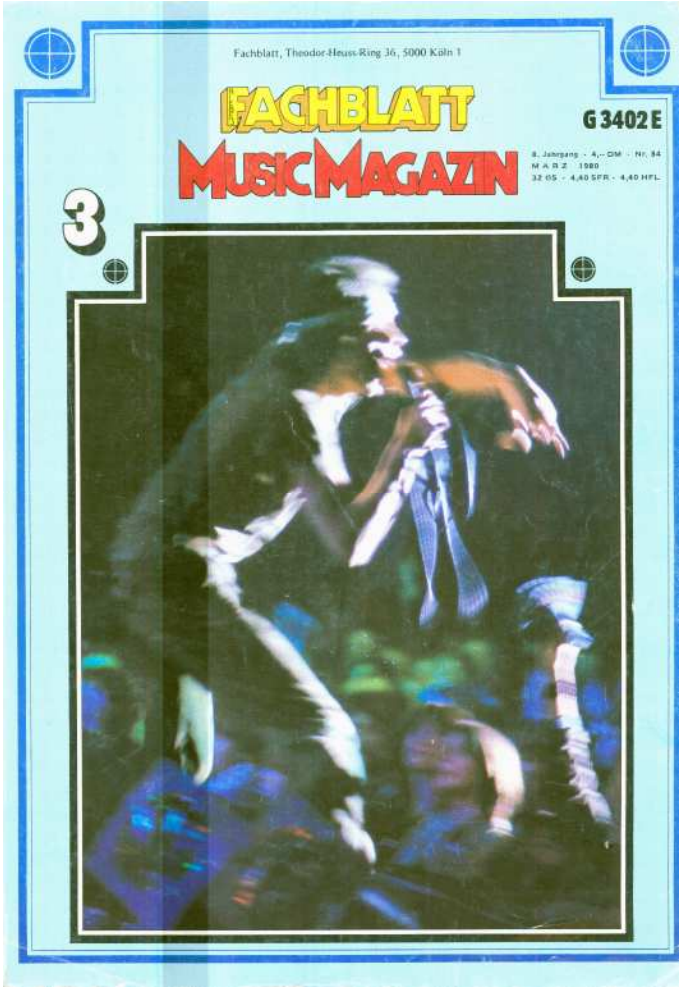
1980 March – Fachblatt Music Magazin (German)
A 12 pages article by Tom Wheeler: “Der Michael-Bloomfield-Legend”.



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1980. Winter – Jefferson Blues Magazine No. 50 (Sweden). 450
Review of Bloomfield/Harris' two concerts in Sweden.

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1980 – "Me And Big Joe" by Michel Bloomfield with S. Summerville. RE/SEARCH productions.
The original was printed in 1980 and sold for $2.95.
In the 1990's it was reprinted, now selling for $5.99.
The original sells for big money these days, so beware!

*****

December 1980 – High Times.
The magazine has the "Me and Big Joe" short story by Michael Bloomfield
with original illustrations by Robert Crumb. Crumb drawing of MB and Big Joe. 7 pages.

*****

1981 April 2 – Rolling Stone #340
Article "Michael Bloomfield – A right to play the blues" by Tom Wheeler. 4 pages.

*****

1981 Summer – Jefferson Blues Magazine No. 52 (Sweden)
Obituary with picture from MB's visit to Sweden in Sep. 1980 + interview.

*****

1983 – Ed Ward: Michael Bloomfield – The Rise and Fall of an American Guitar Hero"
Cherry Lane Books 1983. The first ever MB discography.
Many fine pictures and lots of information. A must for MB fans.

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1983 – The History of Rock # 62.
Article "Blues In Bloom" about MB by Dave Walters. 3 pages.

BLUES IN BLOOM

Mike Bloomfield: from sideman to solo star

A PIONEER OF ELECTRIC blues guitar, Mike Bloomfield perfected a style that assures him a place in rock history. His tragic death in 1981 went almost unnoticed, and yet this was the man *Rolling Stone* magazine once hailed as a leading light of 'the new electric music'.

Born in Chicago in 1943, Michael Bloomfield was the only son of wealthy Jewish parents. At the University of Chicago, he struck up a friendship with Nick Gravenites, who was helping to organise the university's annual Folklore Festival, a showcase for bluegrass instrumentalists and country blues singers through to gospel quartets. Bloomfield was soon captivated by the poetic qualities of country blues legends such as blind Tennessee singer-guitarist Sleepy John Estes and Mississippi slide guitarist Big Joe Williams, and took up playing acoustic guitar himself, also studying blues piano alongside Gravenites.

In 1963, Bloomfield made his recording debut, playing second guitar on a couple of tracks by Sleepy John Estes for the specialist blues label Delmark. Soon after this, blues harmonica player Charlie Musselwhite blew into town, recruiting Bloomfield and Gravenites into a regular working unit to accompany visiting bluesmen. John Hammond Sr, Columbia Records A&R chief, heard a demo tape of the band and signed them to a one-off album deal, which unfortunately fell through. By now, Bloomfield had switched to electric guitar, jamming regularly in South Side blues clubs with the likes of Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy, Otis Rush and Albert King. Early rock'n'roll guitar styles also fascinated him, in particular those of Presley's guitarist Scotty Moore and Cliff Gallup, lead guitarist with Gene Vincent's Blue Caps.

Butter and jam

About the same time, Paul Butterfield was attracting local attention with his strikingly authoritative approach to the blues. His amplified harmonica work was exceptional, steeped in jazz phrasing in much the same manner as that of his mentor, Little Walter Jacobs. His regular band at this time featured Tulsa-born Elvin Bishop on lead guitar and local keyboardist Mark Naftalin, plus two former sidemen from Howlin' Wolf's band – bassist Jerome Arnold and drummer Sam Lay. Jac Holzman, boss of Elektra Records, flew in from Los Angeles to check them out, immediately signing them to an album deal with options. 'Butterfield came over to see me,' Bloomfield reminisced. 'Said he wanted a slide player to sit in on the album sessions.'

Below: The Butterfield Blues Band in 1966 with Mike Bloomfield (second from left). Above: Al Kooper (right) with Paul Simon.

Bloomfield took most of the lead guitar passages, and also wrote or co-wrote three of the songs, while his friend Nick Gravenites contributed the opening track, 'Born In Chicago'. Suddenly the Paul Butterfield Blues Band were the talk of the town. Bloomfield's guitar with its dynamic attack, natural sustain and savoury vibrato was charged with tension, complementing Butterfield's expressive, heavily amplified harmonica. Chuck Berry was impressed enough with the duo to invite them to his *Fresh Berry's* album sessions at the local Chess studios. They featured on the opening track, 'It Wasn't Me'.

Hitting the highway

Some weeks later, Bloomfield received a telephone call from Bob Dylan, whom he had met at a party in Chicago, inviting him to participate in the *Highway 61 Revisited* recordings in New York where Bloomfield met organist Al Kooper. Kooper recalled the date in his book *Backstage Passes*: 'Suddenly Dylan exploded through the doorway, and in tow was this bizarre-looking guy carrying a Fender Telecaster guitar *without* a case. It was the dead of winter and the guitar was all wet from the rain and the snow. He just shuffled into the corner, wiped it off, plugged it in and commenced to play some of the most incredible guitar I ever heard.'

Late in 1965, the Butterfield Blues Band entered Elektra's studios to record the monumental *East-West*, the focal point of which was the 13-minute title track, written by keyboardist Naftalin and Gravenites. An awesome instrumental built on an ascending raga scale, it displayed the solo talents of Bloomfield, Butterfield and Bishop to the full. A revelation at the time, it set the scene for numerous 'jams' in the latter half of the Sixties. 'It was the best band I'd ever been in,' Bloomfield said later. 'Elvin wanted to play lead guitar again, so I went off to form the Electric Flag.'

Regarded as something of a supergroup, the Flag brought together a bunch of musicians who'd been around for several years but had never played together as a unit. Drummer Buddy Miles was recruited from Otis Redding's band, while other members included Harvey Brooks (bass), Barry Goldberg (organ), a four-piece horn section and Nick Gravenites on rhythm guitar and vocals. Bloomfield dubbed them 'An American Music Band' after they made their debut at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival. The group sound veered more towards hard rock than the Chicago blues Bloomfield had been playing with Butterfield, spurred on by Miles' relentless drumming. Their debut album, *A Long Time Comin'*, released by Columbia in early 1968, was a subtle mix of R&B and soul, featuring original numbers interspersed with a few blues classics.

Above: Bloomfield on stage. Above right: Paul Butterfield, supremely gifted blues harp player. Below: Bloomfield (right) in the studio with Bob Dylan.

Film producer Roger Corman heard the album and hired the group to score the music for his psychedelic movie, *The Trip*. Because of its controversial nature, the film received a complete UK ban at the time of its release, and the soundtrack album (on Capitol Records), also failed to get a UK release, even though it featured Bloomfield at the peak of his creativity. The 7 minute 25 second self-penned instrumental, 'Fine Jung Thing', certainly deserved a wider hearing; Bloomfield's fierce lead guitar playing is as representative here as anything he ever committed to record, while the Flag as a group never sounded better. The sessions, however,

were marred by several confrontations between Miles and Bloomfield; one final fight ended with Bloomfield quitting the group, which cut one last album before Miles himself left to form the Buddy Miles Express.

By this stage, Bloomfield had moved from Chicago to San Francisco, where he ran into Al Kooper who was on his way to a session with West Coast psychedelic band Moby Grape and invited Bloomfield along. The end result was captured on the Grape's second album *Wow/Grape Jam* (1968) – an improvised set from Kooper and Bloomfield that was to inspire them to record the *Super Session* album.

Born in New York City in 1944, Kooper had been playing in chart bands since the late Fifities, had written a hit – 'I Must Be Seeing Things' – for Gene Pitney, and had helped form the Blues Project with Danny Kalb, Steve Katz, Tommy Flanders and Artie Traum. He went on to form Blood Sweat and Tears, leaving soon after to go solo. He was to play on three Bob Dylan albums, later working with Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones.

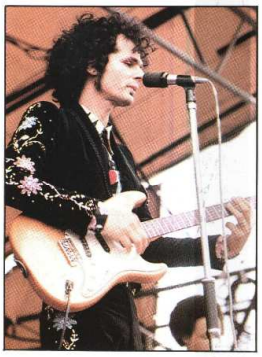
The 1968 *Super Session* was his first major solo assignment, for which he was joined by Bloomfield and Stephen Stills, who was then between Buffalo Springfield and Crosby, Stills and Nash. The line-up was completed by Harvey Brooks (bass) and Eddie Hoh (drums). The record was acclaimed by musicians and fans alike, and remained in the charts until late 1969. The next couple of years were especially active for Bloomfield: he guested on Janis Joplin's *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama*, cut an album (*Two Jews' Blues*) with Barry Goldberg, released a solo LP *It's Not Killing Me* and appeared on *Live At Bill Graham's Fillmore West*.

He also found time to record a live double-album with Al Kooper, *The Live Adventures Of Al Kooper And Mike Bloomfield*. Although the critics panned it as 'self-indulgent', it provided a fitting close to the musical excesses of the late Sixties, and gave Bloomfield his last chart success.

The bloom fades

Bloomfield's career then went into a sharp decline. He began to experiment with heroin, and later became involved in two projects that were doomed to failure. The first was an ill-matched liaison with Dr John and John Hammond Jr for the album *Triumvirate*, released by Columbia in 1973. He tried again with another 'supergroup', KGB, comprising Ray Kennedy, Rick Grech, Barry Goldberg and Carmine Appice. Their debut LP on MCA sold half a million copies, but Bloomfield disowned it: 'It was a pre-programmed mould,' he later confessed. 'They recorded it in LA, then flew the tapes to San Francisco; I just overdubbed my parts.'

As the Seventies progressed, Bloomfield became more and more interested in writing film scores. His works included *Medium Cool* (photographed by his cousin Haskell Wexler) and Andy Warhol's *Bad*. For the movie soundtrack to *Steelyard Blues*, he was reunited with Paul Butterfield and Nick Gravenites, but the music was fairly uninspired.



Top: Paul Butterfield jams with Maria Muldaur. Above: Though better known as a keyboard player, Al Kooper is equally at home on guitar. Along with Bloomfield and Butterfield, Kooper made a great contribution to white electric blues.

Although Bloomfield had become something of a recluse by the mid Seventies, the public still remembered him. In 1976 he was named Best Electric Blues Guitarist in the *Guitar Player* magazine readers' poll, topping the acoustic section two years later. By way of thanks, Bloomfield recorded a special album, *If You Love These Blues, Play 'Em As You Feel*. Financed by the magazine, it conveyed Bloomfield's own feelings towards the idiom, as he narrated and demonstrated various acoustic and electric guitar styles.

By the latter half of the Seventies, Bloomfield had carved a niche for himself that he at last seemed happy with: a recording contract with specialist label Takoma alongside the occasional solo gig in the Bay Area. The intense, screaming guitar solos that were so much his trademark in the Sixties were now replaced by acoustic music filled with rare poetic quality. Albums like *Analine* and the *Bloomfield/Woody Harris* collaboration display this very different side to the guitarist, the latter comprised solely of guitar duets, on a selection of spirituals including 'Peace In The Valley' and 'Just A Closer Walk With Thee'.

Bloomfield's last recording, *Cruisin' For A Bruisin'*, was released late in 1980 and coincided with the guitarist making a short solo tour of folk clubs and coffee houses, playing a mixture of traditional songs and show tunes like Sophie Tucker's 'Some Of These Days'. In addition to guitar, Bloomfield also played five-string banjo and accordion.

The last hours in Bloomfield's life are still shrouded in mystery. He was found dead in the passenger seat of his beige 1971 Mercury, parked in the Forest Hills area of San Francisco on Sunday morning, 15 February 1981, with an empty bottle of Valium on the adjacent seat. The official verdict was death by a drug overdose. The previous evening, however, Bloomfield had attended a fashionable music business party, and it's rumoured that he had OD'd in the early hours of the morning and that his body had been driven to Forest Hills to avert any publicity.

His final concert appearance, just a few weeks before his death, was with Bob Dylan, who called him onstage at San Francisco's Warfield Theatre. Bloomfield plugged in his Stratocaster for a rousing 'Like A Rolling Stone', leaving the stage to a standing ovation. It was probably the way he'd most like to be remembered.

DAVE WALTERS

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1983 June – High Times.
"Copping – Stories from a Lifetime of Getting High on the Road" by Michael Bloomfield as told to Larry Sloman. 7 pages.

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1985 January 4 – Goldmine vol. 10 issue 25 number 116.
Article "Michael Bloomfield – The Coming of Age of the Electric Guitar" by Howard Mandel. 4 pages + cover. Includes discography taken from Ed Ward's book.

Michael Bloomfield

The Coming of Age of the Electric Guitar

by Howard Mandel

All photos courtesy Jeff Tamarkin Collection

Who was Mike Bloomfield guitarist, — bluesman, rock star? Super session player, bandleader, featured sideman? Mixed-up kid, victim of entertainment world pressures, tragically self-destructive artist? And why are we asking about him? Does Mike Bloomfield's career, from its roots in fraternity parties, Jewish youth centers and the streets of late 1950s Chicago to its peaks — bringing the electric blues to a youthful mass audience, founding an "American music band," collaborating with such influential artists as Muddy Waters, Paul Butterfield and Bob Dylan — to its frayed ends that finally ran out in San Francisco in February 1981 — have anything to offer us today? He left a varied legacy on record for our perusal.

Answer yes to all the above, and you're probably a knowledgable fan of late '60s-mid-'70s rock 'n' roll — the American music of youthful excess — and the blues upon which it's largely based. Maybe, like Bloomfield, you're a child of the city yourself, who grew up weirdly curious about the mix of cultures dominating the urban U.S. popular arts since, oh, 1900. Besides being a music lover, perhaps you've had strong feelings about civil rights and authentic experience — especially if you came of age when economic affluence and an undeclared war made social hypocrisy an insult. Or maybe you just like to party.

In any case, you know Bloomfield's electric blues guitar. A stinging tone, long legato lines leading to a bell-like charming — at once tortured and satisfied — the necessarily transcendent climax over predictable chord changes. Fast, *fast* playing; lots of notes spilling forth in gracefully articulate detail, with a musicality that seldom reverted (advanced?) into feedback and distortion, referring instead to an acoustic tradition. A beatified, macho, confrontational sound, almost too facile, but perfect for the kind of myths believed in bars over beer and bourbon by the eager and the restless.

That was Bloomfield, with the original Butterfield Blues Band, with Dylan, Janis Joplin, Al Kooper, Nick Gravenites, Charlie Musselwhite, Mitch Ryder, Buddy Miles, John Hammond, Dr. John, Otis Spann and Ol' Man Muddy. There was a slightly different Bloomfield, who was both younger and older, who waxed with Big Joe Williams, Yank Rachell, Sleepy John Estes — first generation black troubadors — who wrote, sang, and played a little piano as well as guitar on some small label productions late in his life (which ended after 37 years), out of the limelight but nonetheless at the level of peace and creativity brought about only by self-awareness and acceptance. Still, the same guy.

There's a sense — obvious to anyone who ever saw Bloomfield perform live, hyper-kinetic or spacey-sloppy, and supported more recently by Ed Ward's biography *Michael Bloomfield, The Rise And Fall Of An American Guitar Hero* (Cherry Lane Books) — that none of this

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Michael Bloomfield Discography

Information extracted from *Michael Bloomfield: The Rise and Fall of an American Guitar Hero*, by Ed Ward, Cherry Lane Books, with permission.

Albums

Label	Record#	title	release date
Delmark	DL606	Mandolin Blues (Yank Rachell's Tennessee Jug Busters)	1963
	unreleased	Mandolin Blues Recording Session (Yank Rachell's Tennessee Jug Busters)	
	DS608	Broke and Hungry, Ragged and Dirty Too (Sleepy John Estes)	1964
Columbia	unreleased	Columbia Records Demo Session (produced by John Hammond Sr.)	
Elektra	EK294	The Paul Butterfield Blues Band (The Paul Butterfield Blues Band)	1965
Vanguard	VRS9225	The Newport Folk Festival, 1965 (The Paul Butterfield Blues Band and various artists)	
	unreleased	The Newport Folk Festival, 1965 (The Paul Butterfield Blues Band)	
	unreleased	The Newport Folk Festival, 1965 (Bob Dylan)	
Warner Bros.	WS1648	Album (Peter, Paul & Mary)	
Elektra	EKL4002	What's Shakin' (The Paul Butterfield Blues Band and various artists)	1966
Columbia	CS9189	Highway 61 Revisited (Bob Dylan)	
	unreleased	Untitled (Carly Simon)	
Vanguard	VSD79178	So Many Roads (John Hammond)	
Elektra	EKS7315	East-West (The Paul Butterfield Blues Band)	1967
Dyno-voice	DY31901	What Now My Love (Mitch Ryder)	
Sidewalk	ST5908	The Trip (soundtrack) (The Electric Flag, an American Music Band)	
Bluesway	BLS6007	Cherry Red (Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson)	
Columbia	CS9597	A Long time Comin' (The Electric Flag, An American Music Band)	
	CS9701	Super Session (Mike Bloomfield, Al Kooper, Steve Stills)	1968
	OS3240	You Are What You Eat (The Electric Flag, an American Music Band)	1969
Chess	LPS127	Fathers and Sons (Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Mike Bloomfield, Paul Butterfield)	
Mercury	SR61194	Living with the Animals (Mother Earth)	
Chess	1543	Mougie Woogie (Erwin Helfer, Paul Beaver, Mark Naftalin, Fast Fingers Finkelstein (Mike Bloomfield), Norman Dayron)	
Columbia	KGP6	The Live Adventures of Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper (Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper)	
	MGS1	Grape Jim (Moby Grape)	
	CS9893	Live at Bill Graham's Fillmore West (Michael Bloomfield)	
	CS9899	My Labors (Nick Gravenites)	
Record Man	CR5105	Barry Goldberg and Friends (Barry Goldberg, Harvey Mandel, Mike Bloomfield)	
Columbia	KCS9913	I Got Dem Ol' Kosmic Blues Again Mama! (Janis Joplin)	
	KH30395	It's Not Killing Me (Michael Bloomfield)	1970
Fantasy	8414	Brand New (Woody Herman)	1971
Metromedia	BML10175	Take Me As I Am (Without Silver Without Gold) (Tim Davis)	1972
MGM	SE4879	Feels the Spirit (Millie Foster)	
Columbia	RC32172	Triumvirate (Mike Bloomfield, John Hammond, Dr. John)	1973
Verve	V68825	Casting Pearls (The Mill Valley Bunch)	
Columbia	unreleased	Try It Before You Buy It (Michael Bloomfield)	
Atlantic	SD18112	The Band Kept Playing (The Electric Flag)	1974
MCA	2166	KGB (KGB)	1976
Guitar Player	3002	If You Love These Blues, Play 'Em As You Please (Michael Bloomfield)	
Jefferson	602	San Francisco Blues Festival (Michael Bloomfield and various artists)	
Takoma	B1059	Analine (Michael Bloomfield)	1977
TK Records/Clouds	8005	Count Talent and the Originals (Michael Bloomfield)	1978
Takoma	TAK7063	Michael Bloomfield (Michael Bloomfield)	
	TAK7070	Between the Hard Place and the Ground (Michael Bloomfield)	1979
Buddah	BDS5029	Two Jews' Blues (Barry Goldberg and ?)	
Kicking Mule	KM164	Bloomfield/Harris (Michael Bloomfield and Woody Harris)	
Waterhouse	11	Living in the Fast Lane (Michael Bloomfield)	1980
Takoma	TAK7091	Cruisin' for a Bruisin' (Michael Bloomfield)	1981
Tomistoma	?	The Usual Suspects (The Usual Suspects)	

Singles

Label	Record#	title	release date
Dyno-voice	226	The Chicago Loop: (When She Needs Good Lovin') She Comes To Me/This Must Be The Place	1966
	230	The Chicago Loop: Richard Corey/Cloudy	1967

Soundtracks

Label	Record#	title	release date
Sidewalk	ST5908	The Trip (The Electric Flag, an American Music Band)	1967
Columbia	OS3240	You Are What You Eat (The Electric Flag, an American Music Band)	1969
	unreleased	Medium Cool (Mike Bloomfield and Frank Zappa)	
Warner Bros.	BS2662	Steelyard Blues (Nick Gravenites, Mike Bloomfield, Paul Butterfield, Maria Muldaur)	1972
	unreleased	Andy Warhol's Band (Michael Bloomfield)	

Mike Bloomfield Productions

Verve	FTS3023	James Cotton (James Cotton)	1967
	FTS3060	Cotton in Your Eyes (James Cotton)	1968
Cotillion	SD9006	Mourning in the Morning (Otis Rush)	1969
Blue Thumb	BTS14	Sam Lay in Bluesland (Sam Lay)	1970
Columbia	?	Southern Comfort (Southern Comfort)	1971
	?	Melton, Levy & The Day Bros. (Melton, Levy & The Day Bros.)	1973

Excellent two-LP anthology released on Columbia in 1983 includes a cross-section of material from Bloomfield's career.

Although Bloomfield's name appears nowhere on this album, it is common knowledge that the 'Two Jews' are he and keyboardist Goldberg.

The first Butterfield Blues LP.

The all-time classic Butterfield album featuring Bloomfield's guitar work, not to mention Elvin Bishop's.

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was easily accomplished; that there were, indeed, hellhounds on Bloomfield's trail. What haunted him wasn't poverty, hopelessness, and societal antipathy towards his situation. More likely, it was the conflict of familial expectations with his own directions, the terrifying, nearly absolute freedom made possible by his relative wealth, and the consuming public interest in his image.

Can a white boy play the blues? That was the burning issue among the cognoscent, hotly debated in the '60s *because* of Bloomfield, Butterfield, Elvin Bishop and their ilk. Everyone admired Hendrix for his funk, but he was a soul brother. Everyone acknowledged Clapton's talent, but he was entirely other than a genuine bluesman, however reverent his attitude — he was a Brit. Bloomfield, however, had a purist's background to offset his popularizer's career. The gap between how he might have felt — like an apprentice — but was acclaimed as being — a guitar giant, the natural born real thing — seems to loom just beneath the surface of much of his work. He was undoubtably most successful when he could forget it, feel confidence in his surroundings and colleagues, and simply love the feel of a guitar in his hands. Fortunately, he found his confidence often enough to leave a mark on pop music and in memory. Sadly, he wasn't quite sure enough to save himself. That's most certainly the blues.

At his best, Bloomfield was a player with a sure sense of life. Appreciations of his efforts have started with Ward's book; Tim Schneckloth in *down beat* and others; the two-record set *Bloomfield, A Retrospective* (Columbia C2 37578, including previously unreleased musical and interview material) produced by Toby Byron, Bloomfield's musical executor and producer of Ward's book. Byron also furnished copies of many of the discs considered here; having met Mike during his San Francisco/Marin County days, Byron is a friend with a bit of perspective.

According to Ward's discography, Bloomfield appeared on 44 albums released between '63 and '81, performing on five productions which remain unissued (among these, live Butterfield Band and Dylan sets from the Newport Folk Festival and a Carly Simon album also featuring Kooper and member of the Band). There is mention of seven further songs under mandolinist Rachell's leadership besides those issued on *Mandolin Blues* (Delmark DS 606, from 1963).

Bloomfield probably tagged along with Big Joe to Bob Koester's session of Rachell's Tennessee Jug Busters (given the eccentricities of all principals, this was most likely a chaotic affair); his acoustic guitar is not outstanding — much to his credit — on this meeting of the old irregulars. But Koester, a producer into minutiea and purism, must have been impressed, or wouldn't have invited Bloomfield back to play electric behind Sleepy John on *Broke And Hungry, Ragged and Dirty Too* (Delmark DS 608). These recordings were a beginning worthy of celebration, and Bloomfield recounted his lessons from Big Joe in a short story that make hilarious reading: "Me And Big Joe," published by Re/Search Productions of San Francisco and illustrated by R. Crumb.

Ward does a nice job describing Bloomfield's younger years. Bloomfield first heard the blues on the radio in his parents' car; he longed after the toughness he heard in the music, to overcome his school reputation as a wimp; he was obsessed (a lefty, he learned to play right-handed) with the guitar he got from his uncle's pawn shop. He took his first lessons from his mother's hairdresser, and was early on alienated from his father, a restaurant equipment manufacturer.

At age 14, Bloomfield was taking subway rides to Chicago's South Side from its suburbs to hear Howlin' Wolf at Silvio's and Muddy Waters at Pepper's Lounge; he even got to sit in. He developed blues fever in his teens, and met others just as crazed: Gravenites, Bishop, amateur engineer Norman Dayron and Butterfield, all hanging around the University of Chicago. He heard Magic Sam, Earl Hooker and Elmore James, as well as Chuck Berry, Little Walter and Sunnyland Slim. He practiced folk music, worked the Sunday morning flea market on Maxwell Street, and married Susan Smith, who played some banjo. After securing a job managing a Rush Street night club, he really started studying the music that had thrived in Chicago.

Bloomfield was instrumental in turning a North Side bar, Big John's, into a blues scene. At the same time, he was getting some session work at the Chess studios, gigging in topless clubs with organ player Barry Goldberg, and catching the attention of Columbia-linked producer John Hammond, who eventually financed a demo of Bloomfield's loosely organized rock band (it remains in the can except for "Mojo," which is on *Retrospective*). Though Bloomfield wasn't easy around Butterfield, he recognized that they played well together, and was pleased to be invited by Butterfield to make a record date (Butter had sighed to Elektra as that folk label's first electric band) and Newport Folk Fest appearance, to shore up guitarist Bishop's then-questionable chops.

The Newport fest of '65 was a turning point for popular music. Controversy raged: can an electric band play folk? "He could hold his own with *any*body," Bloomfield says of Butterfield on his *Retrospective*. They had come to play: Bloomfield, Butterfield, Bishop, bassist Jerome Arnold and drummer Sam Lay. They were hot, the crowd was cold. Reportedly manager Albert Grossman and folklorist Alan Lomax duked it out in front of the stage during their set. Bloomfield auditioned musicians for Bob Dylan's upcoming performance in the backstage artists' tent, settling on Arnold, Lay, and keyboardists Goldberg and Al Kooper. They played material from Dylan's first "rock" album, *Bringing It All Back Home*, and a new song, "Like A Rolling Stone," to boos from the crowd, which disapproved of Dylan plugging in. But the shape of things to come was decided; within weeks, the Butterfield Blues Band recorded at Mastertone Studios in New York, and Bloomfield had won a spot on Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited*.

That first eponymous Paul Butterfield Blues Band album (Elektra EKS 7294) is a killer, now as then. From "Born In Chicago," a Gravenites original, to "Look Over Yonders Wall," an Arthur Crudup/Big Joe Williams staple, it rocks and swings with a feeling of its own, hard-driving as anything being recorded by Buddy Guy, Otis Rush or Junior Wells at the time. It's an ensemble groove, though Butter's harp work and singing is right up front, similar to some of James Cotton's sides. Bloomfield fits his perfect licks all around Butter's choruses, and the rhythm section, expanded to include organist Mark Naftalin, plays down and dirty, unlike any mid '60s rock band but the Rolling Stones.

More evidence of the Butterfield Band's power is found on *Festival* (Vanguard VSD-79225, another version of "Mellow Down Easy,") and *What's a Shakin'*, an Elektra collection (ELK

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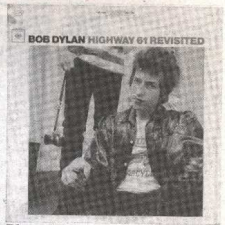


Bloomfield was Dylan's choice to play guitar on this '65 classic.

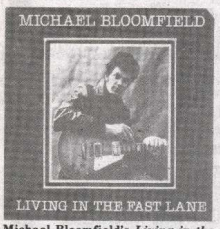
The Electric Flag recorded this soundtrack for a classic psychedelic B-movie (written by Jack Nicholson, starring Jane Fonda) before making this *real* debut LP.

The classic Electric Flag album that — along with Al Kooper's Blood, Sweat And Tears — brought horns to white blues-rock.

The follow-up to "Super Session" featured a Norman Rockwell cover and introduced a new guitarist named Carlos Santana.

Yet another live jam album, which didn't fare as well as others.

The third and last Electric Flag LP to feature Bloomfield was this '74 reunion album on Atlantic.



Michael Bloomfield's *Living in the Fast Lane* LP.

This posthumous release on the Andover label contained previously unreleased material.

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4002) featuring the Lovin' Spoonful and Eric Clapton with The Powerhouse as well as Butterfield's unit (on "Spoonful," "Off The Wall," "Lovin' Cup," "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl," and "One More Mile"). Bloomfield's contributions are high, clean and clear — Bishop solos very little — and Mike's best when he cuts loose, rather than trying to perform a solo he's already thought out. He picks patterns as well as laying down lead lines and obligattos. With Butter, he defined the style innumberable white blues bands would imitate.

Dylan's *Highway 61* (Columbia CS 9189) is something else though, no evocation of any generic form. Guitarist Charlie McCoy, a Nashville cat, is somewhere in the mix (acoustic on "Desolation Row"?), but not on top like Bloomfield is. The focus if firmly on Dylan, whose lyrics were seldom more scathing. "Tombstone Blues" uses Bloomfield's rearing figure as punctuation, an inescapable bell toll. Kooper's organ and Paul Griffin's piano cushion the sound, and Bobby Gregg's drumming has a countryish up-and-down. Bloomfield had a strong rapport with Dylan, and was invited to join his touring band, but determined to stay with Butterfield. "I'm a bluesman," he's reported to have said.

What gave the Butterfield Blues Band's next project, *East-West* (Elektra EKS 7315), its importance is how Bloomfield and the rest stretched their chops into jazz-spirited territory. There was no question, after the model music of the title tune or the long "Work Song," that these guys could play — which couldn't be generally said of the acid rock musicians beginning to emerge on the West Coast. Elvin Bishop had improved, and was eager for more responsibility but Bloomfield hated being on the road, and couldn't counternance Elektra's desire that Butterfield's band come up with a single hit. He also had ideas for a horn band, so he left Butterfield to get his own project together.

Prior to convening The Electric Flag, Bloomfield did sessions with Mitch Ryder *(What Now My Love,* Dyno-voice DY-31901), John Hammond, Jr. *(So Many Roads,* Vanguard VSD-79178), and producer Bob Crewe. He cut one track ("Alimony Blues") with reedman and singer Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson (on *Cherry Red,* Bluesway BLS 6007), and discussed the Flag with his pals Goldberg and Gravenites. Manager Albert Grossman got behind the band, renting Bloomfield a place in Mill Valley, Calif. Mike found bassist Harvey Brooks, drummer Buddy Miles, and his hornmen: saxists Peter Strazza and Herbie Rich, trumpeter Marcus Doubleday, who comprised Bloomfield's most ambitious band.

After debuting at the Monterey Pop Festival (where Jimi Hendrix made his Stateside break through, Otis Redding sang his final set, Janis Joplin and Quicksilver Messenger Service represented the Haight-Ashbury district, and a great music movie was made), the Flag was asked by Peter Fonda to prepare a soundtrack for his film *The Trip* (released as Sidewalk ST-5908). It was mostly short, noodling tracks, unlike the Flag's full-blown effort *A Long Time Comin'* (Columbia CS 9597). The record opened with the words of Lyndon Johnson, and raged through Howlin' Wolf's "Killing Floor" on its way to covering Sticks McGhee's "Wine," and creating an epic "Another Country" (by R. Polte aka Gravenites). Bloomfield is credited with "You Don't Realize," a dedication to Redding and guitarist Steve Cropper in the Stax style, as well as a 50-second rendition of the traditinal tune "Easy Rider." Throughout the album, his blues are happening.

But much of the rest of it has too heavy a feel. Other horn bands — Al Kooper's Blood, Sweat & Tears, which was shortly to break away from the organist / songwriter or Butterfield's regrouped ensemble — had a jazzier sound; for R&B, this was James Brown's heyday. The reasons the Flag broke up were its mid-level popularity (hence, slight profitability), Bloomfield's continuing dislike of touring, conflicts with Buddy Miles' idea of showmanship, and Miles' use — in fact, half the band's use — of heroin. It probably didn't help that Bloomfield's marriage was on the rocks, too.

The middle period of Bloomfield's career, from the dissolution of the Electric Flag in '68 to his spate of independently produced, small label albums in the second half of the '70s, offers intermittent rewards. Though *Super Session'* (Columbia 9701) and the two-fer *The Live Adventures Of Mike Bloomfield And Al Kooper* (Columbia PG 6) were commercially successful, Bloomfield himself came to dislike the discs. The first side of *Super Session* contains his seemingly self-assured guitar playing in all its grace and glory; he obviously comfortable with Kooper (a good writer whose keyboard playing is not always appealing) but the horns seem added on and belie the jam session hype. *Live* is a real jam, with some adventurous material and Bloomfield even singing. "The 59th Street Bridge Song," "The Weight," a couple Ray Charles tunes and "Green Onions" fare well. Bloomfield, an insomniac, was hospitalized during part of the recording, and was spelled by Bishop and Carlos Santana on the subsequent LP's third side. He finished Side Four himself with a hearty rendering of Albert King's "Don't Throw Your Love On Me So Strong."

There was never any problem with Bloomfield's guitar playing — at least, that which survives him. He sounds fine on the two-record set *Fathers And Sons* (Chess LPS 127), reunited with Butterfield, Sam Lay and Buddy Miles, in collaboration with and tribute to Muddy Waters and pianist Otis Spann. During '68-'69, he also contributed to Barry Goldberg's *Two Jews' Blues* (Buddah BDS-5029), outstanding on a Hendrix dedication called "Jimi The Fox." Mike was credited as "???" Called Makal Blumfeld on Mother Earth's *Living With The Animals* (Mercury SR-61194), and as Fast Fingers Finkelstein on the most peculiar *Moogie Woogie* (Chess 1545). He played piano on Mohy Grape's *Grape Jam,* starred in *Live At Bill Graham's Fillmore West* (Columbia CS-9893 — wherein he's learned to yodel), and did session work for Gravenites *(My Labors,* Columbia 9899). He worked with Goldberg again on *(Barry Goldberg And Friends,* Record Man CR-5105) and with Janis Joplin. (Though Bloomfield's completely uncredited on *I Got Dem Ol' Kosmic Blues Again Mama!,* Columbia KCS-9913, he plays the only notable guitar, on "One Good Man" and "To Love Somebody;" Big Brother's ex-lead, Sam Andrew, is nowhere to be heard). Bloomfield is also credited as co-producer on two James Cotton records on Verve, released in 1967 and 1968, as well as on Otis Rush's *Mourning in the Morning,* which, though flawed, deserves another listen.

Gravenites and Michael Melford produced Bloomfield's *It's Not Killing Me* (Columbia KH-30395) which was issued in 1970. After that his appearances become more obscure. There was a Woody Herman album *(Brand New,* Fantasy 8414), and one cut on *Gandharva* (Warner Brothers 1909) by synthesizer collaborators Paul Beaver and Bernie Krause. Bloomfield did tracks for Tim Davis' *Take Me As I Am* (Metromedia BML1-0175) and Millie Foster's *Feels The Spirit* (MGM SE-4879), then had a reunion with John Hammond and Dr. John, *Triumvirate* (Columbia RC 32172) that has a good New Orleans beat.

Leo de Gar Kulka, who'd produced Millie Foster's effort, helped Bloomfield and Gravenites with *Casting Pearls* (Verve V6-8825) by the Mill Valley Bunch; Columbia tried again with *Try It Before You Buy It,* a Bloomfield self-production that went unreleased as conceived (though cuts show up on *Retrospective).* The Electric Flag reassembled for the ill-fated *The Band Kept Playing* (Atlantic SD-18112). By 1974, the white rock record market had lost its mid-'60s hegemony; Bloomfield couldn't get another date until joining Goldberg, bassist Rich Grech, vocalist Ray Kennedy and drummer Carmine Appice in a dreadful "supergroup" dubbed KGB.

While Bloomfield hadn't lost his feeling for the blues — just hear his informal piano playing on "Relaxin' Blues" from '71 (on *Retrospective)* — he was unable to relate to the market. Occasionally he worked at the Keystone Korner in San Francisco with friends including Naftalin on piano, organist Ira Kamin, bassist John Kahn, drummer Bob Jones, and Gravenites or singer Roger Troy. These were great times for other white blues guitarists — notably Clapton, Duane Allman and Dickie Betts, Harvey Mandel, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page and Johnny Winter — but Bloomfield sat them out. There was a Gravenites-produced soundtrack for Jane Fonda's *Steelyard Blues* that disappeared even faster than the film did, and, in the wake of KGB, Bloomfield put out *If You Love These Blues, Play 'Em As You Please,* sold through mail order by *Guitar Player* magazine. It was an educational album, about which Bloomfield explained: "I had this overwhelming urge to do something with integrity."

Integrity turned out to be Bloomfield's finest attribute from 1976 on, though it was but one side of his career. He did soundtracks for *Hot Nazis* and *Sodom and Gomorrah* by San Francisco pornographers the Mitchell Brothers, but what got recorded (after a track on Jefferson Records 602, *San Francisco Blues Festival,* called "Women Lovin' Each Other") was produced by Norman Dayron for several small labels. *Analine* (Takoma B-1059) was the first of these. Bloomfield did everything — guitar, banjo, bass, drums, piano and even vocals on several songs with his own lyrics, thanks to overdubbing. And his emphasis was on acoustic music, including standards like "Frankie And Johnny" and Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo."

Bloomfield's musicological streak took the fore, as he emulated his heroes of the '30s, engaging in piano-guitar duets with Naftalin. His old hopes for an American Music Band, with horns, jump arrangements, and repertoire ranging from '50s rock to blues classics to cajun hits coalesced in his final recordings, with a shifting band of side players. *Count Talent And The Originals* (TK Records/Clouds 8005) is said by Ward to be of mixed quality, but *Michael Bloomfield* (Takoma TAK-7063, with tunes including "Knockin' Myself Out," "Sloppy Drunk," "See That My Grave Is Clean") is quite strong. So are *Between The Hard Place And The Ground* (Takoma TAK 7070, with "Big Chief From New Orleans" and "Your Friends" among others), *Living In The Fast Lane* (Waterhouse Records 11, with "Roots," "Let Them Talk," and "Big 'C' Blues") and *Cruisin' For A Bruisin'* (Takoma TAK 7091, with "Papa-Mama-Rompah-Stompah," "Junker's Blues," "It'll Be Me" and "Snowblind").

Bloomfield's vocals now attained the easy, vernacular authenticity Butterfield had had in earlier days. His guitar playing

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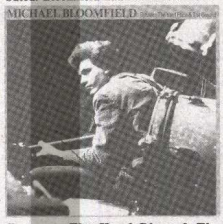
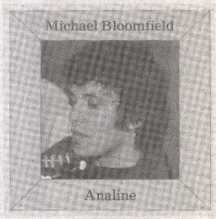
is mature — he plays what he wants to, *how* he wants to, apparently as soon as he thinks of it. The arrangements are attractive — his use of vocal choruses, organs, Moog and Arp synthesizers is perfectly realized. Though nothing exists (except perhaps in Dayron's tape cabinet) of the Naftalin-Bloomfield duets, *Bloomfield/Harris* (Kicking Mule KM-164) is an entire LP of acoustic (and electric slide) duets with Woody Harris. *The Usual Suspects* (Tomistoma Records), issued after Bloomfield was found dead of cocaine and methamphetamine poisoning on Feb. 15, 1981, is dedicated to the guitarist, who recorded his last electric guitar track on "Blue Sea Blues." The album is uncharacteristically autumnal, featuring fiddle and banjo and accordion playing, as well as contributions by Taj Mahal and Nick Gravenites.

In his biography, Ward claims that alcohol was Bloomfield's last demon — and that he *never* messed with the coke and speed to which his death is attributed. Bloomfield had had a late reconciliation with Dylan, though he'd lost Gravenites' companionship due to his drug use. During the last two years of his life, Bloomfield made some substantial efforts to clean himself up. In early '81, after pursuing a dancer named Christy Svane for almost 10 years, Bloomfield proposed marriage to her and she accepted. The exact circumstances surrounding his death remain cloudy — as with so many bluesmen — but he finally had something solid to live for, and his death was a grim waste.

That can never be said of his life. His recordings show he triumphed, almost from the start, over segregation from a music he held dear, over fear he wasn't tough enough to be a player, even over the drugs that have crippled the expressivity of too many a creative person. Of course, there's only brief respite from the blues, in the end; if you got 'em, they'll get you. The blues got Mike Bloomfield, but he gave 'em back to us enriched by a liberating guitar style and a deep understanding of their source. What more can a bluesman do? ○



Between The Hard Place & The Ground LP.



Bloomfield's *Analine* album.

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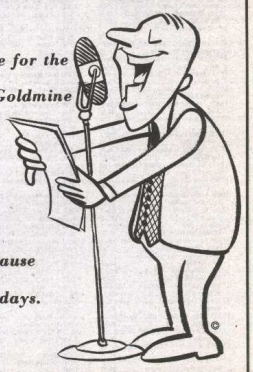

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1987 June 19 – Goldmine
"Paul Butterfield dead at 44" (May 4, 1987).

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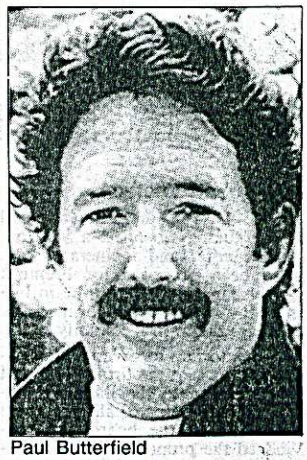
1987

Obituaries 1987

Paul Butterfield; took blues to world of rock


Paul Butterfield

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Paul Butterfield, a harmonica player who helped popularize the blues for rock 'n' roll audiences in the 1960s, has died at age 44.

The musician was found dead in his apartment Monday by his manager, Jesse Turajskt, said coroner's spokesman Bill Gold. An autopsy was scheduled.

Mr. Butterfield, who studied classical flute and then mastered the harmonica by age 16, grew up on Chicago's South Side and became one of the first young white musicians to venture into black blues clubs, where he played with Howlin' Wolf, Buddy Guy and Little Walter.

"Butterfield revived a music that was dying in Chicago," said Bernie Pearl, blues historian and musician. "He took the music out of Chicago and breathed life into it. He was a historic figure."

As a student at the University of Chicago, Mr. Butterfield met guitarist Elvin Bishop in the early 1960s, and they formed the Butterfield Blues Band, which included guitarist Mike Bloomfield.

The band stirred interest among blues musicians because of its use of amplification and material combining blues, folk, rock and jazz.

The band recorded two albums for Elektra Records that were credited with paving the way for high-energy British blues groups that surfaced in the late 1960s.

"Butterfield was certainly one of the pivotal figures in raising the consciousness of blues in what was a white-dominated '60s rock world, and also helped make the idea of a white musician playing the blues credible," said Robert Hilburn, Los Angeles Times pop music critic.

Although organizers of the 1965 Newport Folk Festival ruled out amplified instruments, they relaxed the rule for Mr. Butterfield's group. The band accompanied Bob Dylan, who outraged folk purists with his move into electrified music.

After Newport, the band, adding a brass section, toured both in and outside the United States.

In the 1970s Mr. Butterfield switched to an acoustic-electric lineup with a group called Better Days, which toured and recorded until health problems curtailed Mr. Butterfield's activity.

He made an appearance at the farewell concert of The Band in 1976, which was made into the documentary "The Last Waltz".

In 1980 Mr. Butterfield suffered a perforated intestine and was stricken with peritonitis. He underwent two operations before returning to the stage in 1981.

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Review of "Lost Elektra Sessions" by Al Kooper.
Review of "Lost Elektra Sessions" from various magazines.

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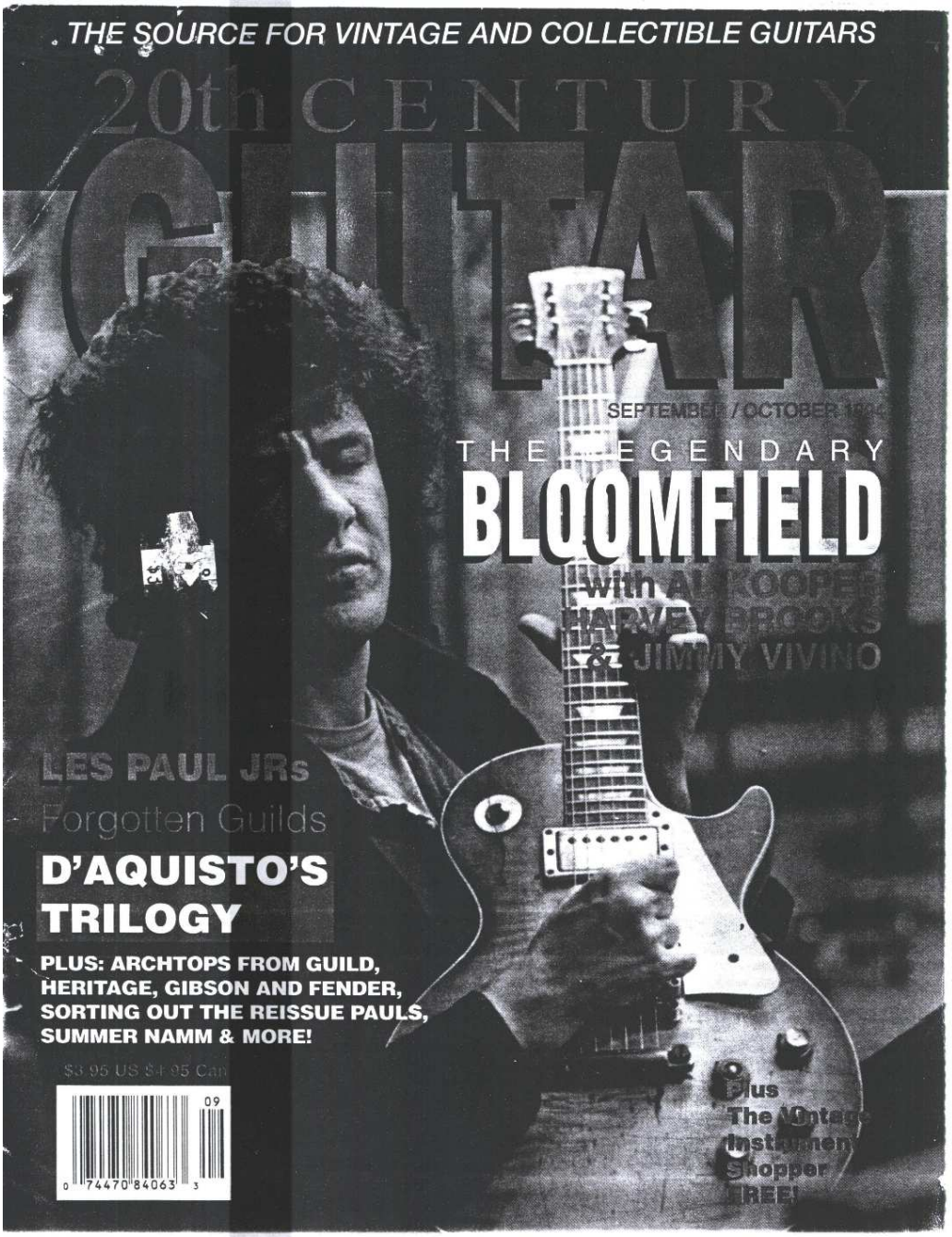
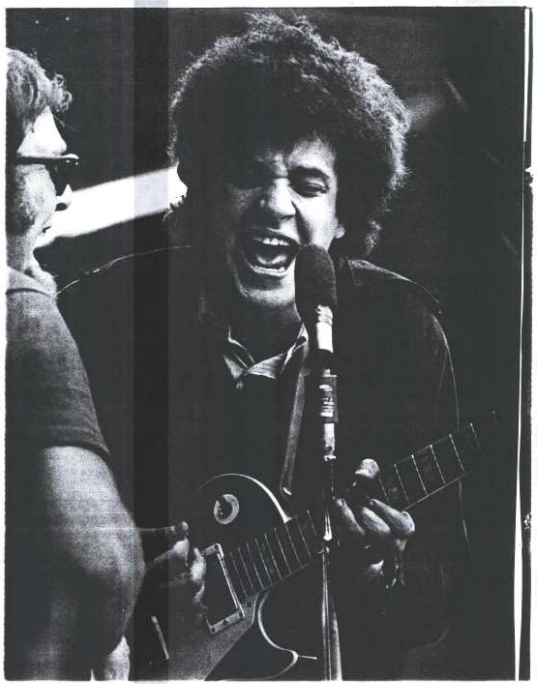
1994. Sept./Oct. – 20th Century Guitar
Article: The Legendary Michael Bloomfield with Al Kooper, Harvey Brooks & Jimmy Vivino. Introduction by Mark Lotito. Cover and 9 pages.





THE LEGENDARY

MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD

With Al Kooper, Harvey Brooks & Jimmy Vivino

Introduction by Mark Lotito

One note and you know it's Bloomfield. Michael Bloomfield, unlike so many modern blues guitarists who spew out soaked up, recycled licks, infused his own soul into every note he played. While he clearly had his own influences, he conveyed his blues solos with intensity, heart and substance. A Jewish boy growing up in Chicago in the Fifties would hardly seem a candidate for a Blues Master. Michael's father, Harold Bloomfield, was a wealthy businessman who owned a restaurant supply company and was not thrilled with his son's musical proclivities (the next time you see a coffee maker in a diner with the Bloomfield name on it, think of Michael) and Bloomfield clearly rebelled against this. Post WW II Chicago was a hotbed of blues activity with the preeminent players of the time and Michael was right there with them. Starting to play guitar at age thirteen, Michael was soon hanging around the blues bars of Chicago, sitting in (with the likes of Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Albert King, Otis Rush, etc.) whenever he could, and honing his chops.

Although Bloomfield recorded early on with bluesmen such as Sleepy John Estes, Big Joe Williams (whom Michael befriended and later wrote a book about) and Yank Rachell, it was not until he joined The Butterfield Blues Band that Michael gained wider public prominence. Bloomfield's stint with the Butterfield Band was perhaps frustrated by the inclusion of guitarist Elvin Bishop and, after two albums, he left. As important as Michael's time with Butterfield was, it was with Bob Dylan that he became a household name. Al Kooper had recorded with Michael on Dylan's Highway 61 Revisited sessions and would soon be rubbing shoulders with him again, supporting Dylan at the Newport Folk Festival with The Butterfield Blues Band. Soon after, Michael started a band of his own. The Electric Flag was conceived as a group which would present a cross-section of American music. With heavyweights such as Nick Gravenites, Buddy Miles and Harvey Brooks on board, this band recorded a fine album, played the Monterey Pop Festival, recorded a soundtrack and toured before Michael decided to leave the band.

Michael was a respectable piano player bringing with him a fine sense of phrasing and feel which he displayed on an early John Hammond album and a Moby Grape jam session recording. Super Session was Al Kooper's idea and represents some of Michael's finest recorded moments (even if he didn't think so). With a tone to kill for, Bloomfield played with such feeling and originality that he influenced a generation with this record alone. Kooper and Bloomfield soon followed this up with a live album before parting ways. Michael played Teles and Strats at different times but it was during this period that he played Les Pauls through Fender Twins, for which he will most be remembered.

Michael's solo career is well documented on various small labels which present more personal statements reflecting his interest in all genres of American music. Playing more slide and acoustic than before, Michael's individuality is even more evident than before, playing an eclectic array of styles from gospel to Ellington. His acoustic arsenal included several custom guitars, a Kay archtop, mandolin and banjo. It was as though he was trying to educate his public to all of the musical history he had learned and loved (he cut an album for Guitar Player Magazine with spoken introductions explaining the origins of each style). During this period Michael also scored several soundtracks (The Trip, Medium Cool, Steelyard Blues, Andy Warhol's Bad) and interestingly, several porno films (Sodom And Gomorrah, the Mitchell Brother's Ultra-Core series). Michael had insomnia which wreaked havoc on several recording projects and an on-going battle with hEroin, about which he spoke freely. Michael Bloomfield died of a drug overdose February 15, 1981.

There has been renewed interest in Michael Bloomfield's music recently with re-issues and never before released material available on CD and "Bloomfield Notes," a newsletter about Michael's music, is currently being published. What follows is an intimate conversation between Jimmy Vivino and Michael's musical companions Al Kooper and Harvey Brooks during a recent visit to Nashville. The first part takes place at Al's house with Jimmy and Harvey, the second is between Jimmy and Harvey on the way back to New York. →

Opposite: Bloomfield and Harvey Brooks at Monterey. Photo By Jim Marshall.

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MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD

Harvey Brooks & Michael Bloomfield recording Super Session

Photo by Jim Marshall

JV: We just came back from the NAMM show and we all made out pretty good. All home with lots of toys. We played last night, last night. Al Kooper on organ, Harvey Brooks on bass James Wormsworth on drums and I got to play guitar. We're talking about Michael Bloomfield. We weren't going to do this with all three of us sitting here but we have the tape recorder running so lets let it roll.

I'll ask Al first, and I know a lot of people have heard this story, but for those who have not heard it, when was the first time encountered this guy?

AK: We were doing the Dylan sessions for "Like A Rolling Stone"He brought his guitar in without a case in the winter, it was all wet. I was the guitar player then. I heard him warming up. He got a towel and wiped off the guitar and plugged it in and started playing. I went, "Jesus, I've never heard anyone play like that, especially someone my age." So, I packed up my guitar.

JV: Was Harvey at this session?

AK: No, this was my first time there. Harvey and I had a deal that if one guy got a gig, he would bring the other in if it was at all possible.

JV: So, Harvey made out pretty good in that deal.

AK: No. Because the last gig Harvey got me in our partnership was at the World's Fair. That was almost as good as the Dylan gig.

JV: Is that where you guys played like five or six shows a day on top of the carousel.

HB: Yeah, but we worked six days a week and it was guaranteed money. We alternated with a merry-go-round.

JV: So then Dylan asked you to find a bass player?

AK: No, I pushed Harvey down his throat. He let me do it.

JV: So, the Rolling Stone session was just session guys, basically. How come Bloomfield was in on that?

AK: Because Dylan wanted to upset the apple cart. Dylan knew him from Chicago. This was before Newport.

JV: I had heard that Dylan was in Chicago and someone told Bloomfield to go check this guy Dylan out and that's how they met. Mike didn't think he was much of a guitar player.

AK: I can't imagine why.

Photo by Jim Marshall

Al Kooper & Michael Bloomfield recording Super Session

JV: After the "Rolling Stone" sessions came Newport. Did Dylan call you back for that?

AK: No. I happened to be there because I would go every year as a spectator. I even bought tickets. I was walking around and Albert Grossman found me. He said that they were looking for me because Bob wanted me to play with him. Then I sold my tickets and had a wonderful time.

JV: You went on stage with what was basically the Butterfield band. Was Sam Lay there at that time?

AK: Sam was there, Jerome Arnold, Goldberg was there. I played organ and Goldberg played piano. And, of course, Michael on guitar.

JV: What did you guys play?

AK: We did "Like A Rolling Stone," Maggie's Farm" and "Tombstone Blues." I have a video of the show.

JV: With sound?

AK: Yeah.

JV: Is it any good?

AK: I'll put it on.

JV: Sorry to all you readers that can't see this, but we'll be right back.

OK, you guys missed it, but we just saw "Maggie's Farm" from Newport. It seemed like the audience loved it. It seemed like all the mythology that you hear about the audience booing is untrue. I didn't hear any cat calling. Was it the next gig in Forest Hills where that started?

AK: Yeah. By that time all the booing was perhaps because they should boo us. They were told to.

JV: It was the media again.

HB: At that gig, the audience was really far back. There was a huge "grassy knoll" between the band and the audience. It was really distant.

JV: On the video, Bloomfield seemed to be playing with reckless abandon. Was that the way it was pretty much of the time?

AK: At this time he was not as formed would become. He was still pasting his act together. Technically, he certainly had a grasp of the instrument but he hadn't learned to string his phrases together.

JV: That particular arrangement sounded like Elmore James' "Rolling and Tumbling" in the guitar part to me. Did Michael come up with that or was it something that Bob told him to play?

AK: No, we were just jamming. We stayed up all night rehearsing at some mansion in Newport. Nobody said to play this or that, we just played over and over again until we knew the chords.

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JV: Were you feeding off of what was happening or just jumping in where you could with that kind of a situation. Being an arranger, even then, you weren't that kind of player.

AK: I was on the side and I had to get a sideman mentality and shut up. Being an arranger, if I thought I knew how to solve a problem, I would certainly speak up. I wasn't bashful. I don't really recall what role I played then.

JV: It sounded pretty together.

AK: Well, Michael and I were the veterans. We had played on the record. Everybody else, I imagine, would have been more uptight about it than Michael or I was.

JV: Did you and Michael start to hang out at this time or were you still new acquaintances?

AK: Still new acquaintances. We were definitely kindred souls. Jewish guys in their twenties both trying to break through. I was probably more ambitious then he was.

JV: Did you know he was the piano player he was?

AK: No. The only things I knew about him, I had read. Just by coincidence I had read an article and picture of him and he was fat in the picture. When I met him at the Dylan gig, I put it together and thought, "Hey, this guy's lost weight." I was ready for this chubby guy.

JV: So next you guys are called back to do the record, "Highway 61."

AK: I was called back and I just said to Bob that I had a great bass player.

HB: Then Al calls me and says, "Harvey, I'm playing with Bob Dylan." I didn't know much about him at that time.

JV: Weren't you on the folk scene by then?

HB: No, that was afterwards. He said they were doing a recording session and the only thing I knew about recording sessions at that time was from things I had done with Al. Demos and things.

AK: We used to get hired by a guy named Wes Farrell and other guys that knew me and would hire me cheap. I played keyboards and guitar and I would bring Harvey and whoever and we would do sessions. A lot of sessions.

JV: Had Michael come down to do that stuff with John Hammond yet?

AK: I think so. I think that is where Dylan found him. There is a very interesting event that took place at this time. Bob knew that he was going to try Forest Hills and the Hollywood Bowl and he asked us to be the band. We were having lunch one day and Bloomfield turned it down to go and do the Butterfield thing. I said to him, "Why don't you do this thing?" He said to me, "You guys are going to get on the cover of Time Magazine and get all kinds of chicks. I just want to play the blues."

JV: But you guys didn't have anything else going on except the Dylan gig?

AK: What are you talking about? We had the World's Fair gig!

JV: Michael was a guy from Chicago playing up there with Buddy Guy and people like that.

AK: He was on the road already. He was also locked in with Butterfield.

HB: When Paul Rothchild went to Chicago to hear Butterfield, Butterfield took him to see the Bloomfield band. Then Bloomfield ended up with Butterfield. I met Michael much in the same way Al did. I was at the studio for the Dylan sessions and was really nervous. I went in to set up my guitar and suddenly heard the door at the other end of the studio slam. This guy comes running across the room with a guitar slung over his shoulder - he still had no case - and says, "Hey, man, How ya doin'. My name is Michael Bloomfield." He was asking me questions, answering them and telling me stuff all at the same time. It was a barrage of information. But he was immediately likable.

JV: Did he bother to tune up? Because "Queen Jane Approximately" - was that the first thing you guys did?

AK: I think it's important to understand that there were no tuners at the time. The tuning mentality was different. You got the note from somebody and tuned your instruments. They wouldn't stop the tape for something like intonation. Let's tell the truth, the producer couldn't tell if it was out of tune.

JV: Some of it is endearing to me now. Some people say it's unlistenable, but I can always when its Michael.

AK: Another way to look at it, is that old blues records were never in tune and if you want to take that as derivative of those, then that's accurate. I think Michael would have wanted to be more in tune.

HB: We did the Dylan stuff in one take. Run through it once and put it down. You really to be horribly off for them to stop the tape.

AK: Bloomfield was not intimidated by Dylan or anyone. It was very refreshing.

JV: Would you say that Michael's idea of "making it" would have been a great blues gig as opposed to a great pop gig?

AK: It's hard to break that down because when he said to us that he was going to play the blues, he was just playing the martyr. Chances are he had just made a commitment to Butterfield.

JV: When you heard the Butterfield record and heard what he went up there to do, were you gassed by it?

AK: I didn't like it. I was very turned on by his guitar playing and I thought there was precious little of it on that album. I didn't care for the production.

JV: Then or still?

AK: Both. Though I have a little more tolerance for it now. My point of reference was different. My blues education wasn't so hot but I had heard it. The Butterfield band was trying to emulate the Chicago blues thing. White boys playing black boys' music. I didn't get it because I had no real point of reference.

JV: I heard that Michael used to play on the streets of Chicago.

HB: He did with Norman Dayron.

AK: The thing that you have to understand about Michael is that he was a rebel. He was a rebel because he came from an incredibly rich family. His father was the head of Beatrice Foods. They hold the patent on the classic salt shaker. We used to be in a restaurant and he would say to pick up the salt and turn it over. There would be a "B" for Bloomfield Industries. I went to his family's house for Sunday breakfast and his old man was dressed like he just got back from a fox hunt. Here we are, Alan Bloomfield, Mike's brother, Michael, his mother, the father and me sitting down to bagels and lox at eleven o'clock in the morning and the father was almost divorced from the whole thing. Michael was talking about the looney bin he had just gotten out of. He had checked himself in because he couldn't sleep. Michael's insomnia was like a demon to him. I told him to get a hobby or something. But not sleeping was driving him crazy. So, yes, he would play on the streets but it was

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want to give it to them, they are not going to come.

JV: Well, Hendrix was going through the same thing in a lot of ways. In the Band Of Gypsies he wanted to stand still and play the guitar. And someone is on the side at the Fillmore screaming Foxy Lady and burn your guitar.

HB: The difference being is that Jimi loved to be out there playing. He didn't have a problem with the life of the audience. The only problem Jimi had was towards the end, he just wanted a break. His management wanted him to keep going. When you have that responsibility, they all depend on you.

JV: Did Jimi and Mike ever hook up?

HB: There was a place we used to rehearse called the Heliport which was between Sausalito and Mill Valley and whenever Jimi would come into town, he would come over to my house and Mike would come over and we would sit around and play a little bit then go down to the Heliport. Buddy, Jimi, myself and Mike.

JV: Is that where Jimi hooked up with Buddy?

HB: Yeah. I knew Jimi from New York. I almost signed him to Verve/Folkways.

JV: Is that when he was with John Hammond?

HB: Yeah, John and the Blue Flames. Chas Chandler beat me by about two weeks. I said to Jimi that I had a deal for him at Verve and he said that he had signed with Chandler. That was probably the best thing for him. But Michael and Jimi played so different.

JV: Completely. Jimi was a real electric Muddy Waters. Michael was more uptown Chicago-style.

HB: Michael was Chicago-style that drop acid. He would play those licks for a little while and then just go off.

JV: I could hear you guys do the modal stuff.

HB: We would be very traditional then just take it to the next step. Any time we came up with something that we stretched an arrangement, Minor/Modal was the way.

JV: There were some wonderful licks there. I still try to get them.

HB: I remember Larry Coryell coming over one day and having this conversation with Michael and Larry was saying, "Why don't you just take it a little further." Michael would say, "That's not what I do, that's not what I want to do. That's what you do." Michael didn't want to learn anything. He just wanted to learn what he liked. He would cite B.B. King as his inspiration.

JV: I have an album that I bought in a truck stop once called "B.B. King Guitar" and it was just instrumentals. And boy, if it doesn't sound like Bloomfield owned a copy of that record and just sat down with it, I hear every lick but sort of in a embryonic state. Bloomfield took it beyond that.

HB: He could play those licks. He could really play those B.B. King licks exactly. He just didn't. He didn't want to insult B.B. I remember one time when we were down in Los Angeles doing the movie "The Trip" with Peter Fonda and we walked into this place they got us called The Castle. We went into this place and went down to this bottom room and put the record player on. We put on Albert King's "Oh, Pretty Woman." We listened to that and then put on "Strange Brew" where Clapton stole the solo note-for-note. We talked about that a lot and said, "What does this mean?" We couldn't figure it out. It was not something we wanted to be a part of.

JV: In my own way I do that with Michael because I think it needs to be done. And in some way I think Clapton felt it needed to be done with Albert. It's more of a tribute than anything. That's what I get from that. And the truth is that guys like Michael and Eric turned us younger guys onto the older guys. And it really worked. I love them for that. The truth is Michael would quote but never do exactly. He would paraphrase.

HB: And like I was saying before, he had a certain style, he got into this kind of Latin style where he used to do this little dance and play real cutesy.

JV: Like on 'Mary Ann." That stuff was wonderful. There was also something on Nick's album like that. Do you remember Norman Dayton being around with his tape recorder much back in those days? He seems to have gotten so much of Michael on tape at some of the worst times, actually. He put it out and the posthumous stuff shouldn't have been put out.

HB: I think that Norman just wanted to make some money.

JV: I also think that Norman, being a friend of Michael's, knew that the genius was there. Michael sometimes gets a rap for being a sloppy player because of some of this stuff.

HB: In the annals of rock history, it's not those late recordings that anybody is going to listen to. They don't really exist. They will never exist for anybody except for collectors.

JV: Guys like me are really fascinated with everything he did. We were talking about the extended jams on Super Sessions and the Miles Davis stuff you did at a recording session that you didn't get a chance to do with the Flag.

HB: That was the missing ingredient. On the Electric Flag records every thing was rehearsed and we had parameters we had to follow. You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that. Really the best part of the band was when we went to the jam mode. The only song that got to that point on record was "Another Country." Even that got systemized. On gigs we just played and someone would have the part to bring us back in. When we heard the part we all came back.

JV: The Super Sessions opened this door in rock. Cream were doing it too, on their live records where we would hear those extended jams. Being an audience member back then while you guys were doing it, the reason I went to concerts was that I knew the concert was going to be better than the record because you guys were going to stretch out. Not like today where the audience wants to hear the video.

HB: One of the failings of The electric Flag was exactly this. We were making it into a formula. The only time we stretched out was on a slow blues. It was more like a rhythm and blues show. The showboating would come vocally. It was also the thing that lead to the demise. Buddy was holding it back and making it into a revue. Buddy always visualized a James Brown revue. That was what was stuck in his mind.

JV: With the Super Session thing, was it odd to just go into the studio and blow?

HB: No, it was great.

JV: But is was out of the ordinary, though.

HB: All of the jamming and all of the playing happened not on the gig and not in the studio. It happened in rehearsals and at jams. I played for hours with Carlos Santana and others and we were all intermingled in other situations. But when it came down to business. . . Also, some of the habits just got in the way of people

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Photo by Jim Marshall

Mark Naftalin, Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel & Michael Bloomfield @ Monterey

because he wanted to. It wasn't for the money.

JV: Why do you think he is almost forgotten in the progression of the great players.

AK: Primarily because he didn't really break any ground. Michael's desire was to keep the blues alive and try to project it to the next generation in a form they could understand. In his later years he got more in tune and more collective within himself musically.

JV: Was that Hubert Sumner's gold top that Michael played?

AK: Only sick people like you would know that. He might have mentioned something like that but I don't know. I think we should also bring up, since we are talking about the good and the bad, he was an incredible liar. But it wasn't malicious. One time I saw him and I asked him what he was doing. He said he was doing sessions like you wouldn't believe. Things like the Jackson Five and things like that. I'm thinking to myself, "No way are you playing with the Jackson Five." I just laughed. He never lied in a malicious way. Harvey was close with him in a band situation, I was never close to him like that.

JV: Let's get to that. This would be around 1967. Al has left the Blues Project, Blood, Sweat & Tears has not yet formed, though the seeds are there, Harvey is at Monterey, Al is the stage manager at Monterey, The Flag is playing their first gig. Now you get a call from whom? Michael?

HB: Yeah, I got a call from Michael and he is in town with Barry and they are putting a band together. They went to the Murray the K Show. Murray was hiring, doing the RKO show.

JV: That was that great show. They had the Rascals, Wilson Picket, Mitch Ryder, Cream, The Who.

HB: Wilson Picket was there and Buddy Miles was playing drums. So I'm sitting there and I can't believe this guy Buddy. So, I get to talking to Buddy, he was just a kid then, maybe sixteen, but he was good. Michael and Barry were staying at the Albert Hotel and I tell them to check Buddy out. We get Buddy as the drummer and go out to California. Nick was already out there.

JV: Did you guys know yet what a great singer Buddy was?

HB: No. But, you're gonna love this, Al. Just before this, I had done some demos for David Clayton Thomas.

AK: He was in a Canadian band called the Bostonos or the Underdogs or something like

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that. They came and played at the Scene which is where I think Steve Katz heard him.

HB: He had number 1 records in Canada. I gave David my apartment and went off to California.

AK: This was pre-Blood, Sweat & Tears, just want everyone to know that.

HB: Yes.

JV: Pre-Al's Blood, Sweat & Tears.

HB: We go to Michael's house and they are set up to rehearse. Michael was the leader. The band kicks right off. We were playing a lot of James Brown stuff. Michael had a scheme for this band. He had a formula that he wanted to do. When the horn players came they knew the arrangements. We played it and got a feel for it and he would make it happen. He would show people what to play.

JV: There's two white guys at that time that could do it. There was Clapton's "Have You Heard" and Michael's tone on "Texas."

HB: Just take a step further. What Michael added to what he got from the old blues players was his guts. He had acid coming out of his body. I have never in my life seen anybody like him.

JV: The thing that got me was the "hunch." When he would hunch over the guitar he was into it.

AK: He had serious guitar face.

JV: But it was not affected. It was not MTV guitar face.

HB: There was nothing about him that was affected. He was pure emotion. He was 100% real.

JV: What about Monterey.

AK: Well, I was very curious. I was dreaming about a band that had horns in it and here is my pal Harvey and my pal Bloomfield in a band with horns. They were booked as "The Sound" or something.

JV: Where did the name come from?

HB: We played at a high school and there was this base with a motor in it and a pole with holes and a flag. The motor would blow air through the pole and wave the flag. It would sit on top of the organ.

JV: An electric flag. So they take the stage at Monterey.

AK: I'm sitting there and nervous as anything. My great idea is taken.

JV: And you know these guys capability.

HB: But that band at that stage was not capable of doing what Blood, Sweat & Tears was going to do because Michael and Barry's style was very Chicago and to do anything more you had to have the extensions.

JV: But you didn't know that.

AK: All I knew was horns, Harvey, Bloomfield. I'm terrified. They go on and started playing but first Michael made a short speech.

JV: I think it's on the record.

AK: I don't know but now it's on my answering machine. Give me the phone and we can get it word for word. I was in tears laughing he was so funny.

JV: Hendrix was there. Did Michael know what was going to happen?

AK: We had seen Hendrix in the Village.

HB: But what Hendrix did at Monterey, we had never seen before. What he did at Monterey was unbelievable.

AK: When the Flag did play, I was very happy. They went over real well, and it wasn't anything like I was going to do. And, of course, Harvey was in a band! Now I was jealous because he was in a band and I wasn't.

JV: Now you had to put a band together and couldn't use Michael or Harvey.

AK: Well, Michael wasn't the player for BS&T. I knew that and even if he was free, I wouldn't have asked him. Originally, I wanted Danny Weaks. He was playing with Iron Butterfly but I couldn't talk him out of that. Monterey was a very joyful moment. They played well. Everyone that knew them knew they were nervous.

HB: Michael and I were in a room with Brian Jones, who was an incredibly nice person and was very much into the blues. He and Michael could really talk shop.

JV: Do you think Michael slept the night before?

HB: No way. I didn't even sleep the night before.

JV: How long could that go on? Three, four nights in a row?

HB: There would be times where I would hear him in the middle of the night playing. It would be real quiet but it would be real intense.

JV: But finally, you guys get to play together.

By 1968, Al has left Blood, Sweat and Tears but you had some projects to do for CBS.

AK: When I left the band, I offered my services to CBS as a producer because that's what I wanted to do. It was also very important because I was the first "longhair" hired by CBS. That's very significant for that time. I had an office and a secretary and an expense account.

JV: And a palm tree?

AK: Yes. To me it was important to succeed so that other people like me could get those jobs. So here I am at CBS with an office and everything and nobody to produce. It was too early for me to do my own solo album. I did a single with Tim Rose and then I did a session with Moby Grape called Grape Jam. Michael played piano on it. You have to understand that at this point our careers had been amazingly parallel. We were both Jewish kids in our twenties, we both played on "Like a Rolling Stone," we both left Dylan and formed blues bands, we both left the blues bands and formed horn bands and we both got kicked out of the horn bands that we formed.

JV: And both played with Harvey.

AK: That one we'll skip. So, I'm sitting in the office with no one to produce and I'm looking at the Grape Jam album, it has our pictures on the cover and I'm thinking this is unbelievable. The Moby Grape thing was a little novelty thing. I thought, let's do a serious jam thing. I called up Michael and I said to make it fair we'll each pick a side man with the other's approval. I said I want Harvey and he agreed. So, again, I got my partner back. He said he wanted Eddie Hoh, the drummer with the Mommas and Pappas. I didn't understand that at all. I had never heard of this guy. I told him I didn't know this guy's playing at all but I would trust him on this. I booked the sessions and I book a house for us to stay in. I was very disappointed up until this point with all of Michael's playing on records, including the Flag. I had played with him live and I knew what he could do. I figured that if we weren't making a record and were just going in to play we could get out of Michael what he was capable of. I felt that, if people hadn't seen him live, they couldn't understand what all of the fuss was about. We went in, and we all knew the boundaries of what we could do. This was going to be a rock and roll jam session record, we weren't going to do jazz interpretations of

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relaxing and just playing. We had a hard time keeping the horn players focused. The tuning problem drove the horn players nuts.

JV: Is it just me and a handful of other guys who remember Michael?

HB: No. Michael will be remembered for his things with Butterfield where I think he broke things open. Those were major contributions. I think his blues playing in general, people will always go back to that.

Special thanks to Al Kooper and Harvery Brooks for taking the time to do this and, of course, to Jimmy Vivino for pulling it all together. Also, thanks to Mark Lotito for planting the seed, making the weekly trek to "Down Time," where Jimmy plays every Thursday night, to keep it alive and following it through to the end.

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1995 July 15 – Rolling Stone and others.
Review of Winner 446 “Strawberry jam” CD.

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Review of “Winner 447 “East-West Live” CD by Jan Mark Wolkin for Winner.

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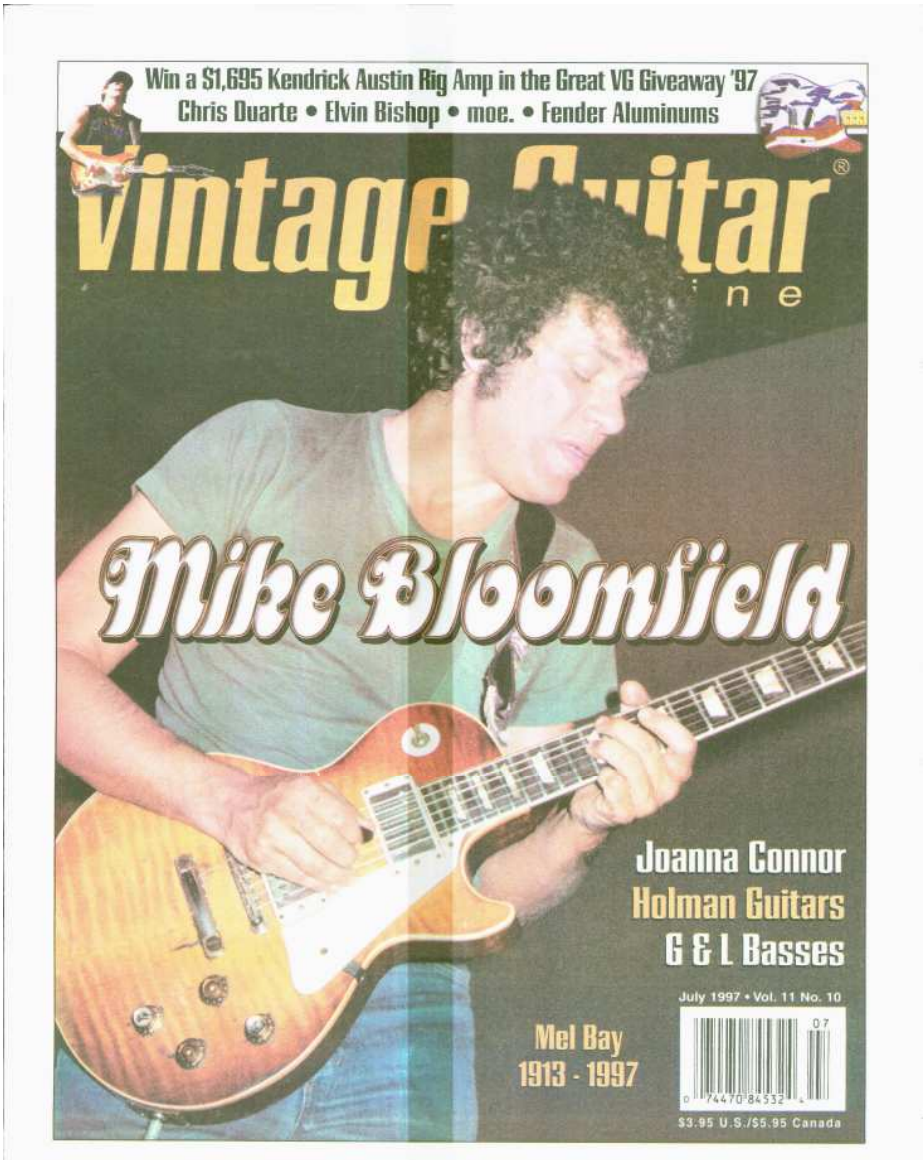
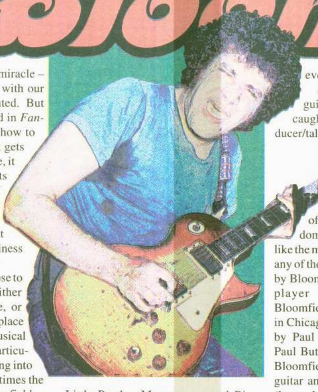
1997 July – Vintage Guitar, vol. 11 No. 10.
Article “Mike Bloomfield – A Legend in His Time…and Ours” by Dave Kyle. 3 pages.
Pictures from a show at Ravoli Theater, Indianapolis, 1973.



Mike Bloomfield
A Legend in His Time...and Ours



Music is the closest tangible thing to magic most of us will ever experience. The fact that sounds can be combined in harmony out of inanimate objects is nothing short of a miracle – one those of us still blessed with our hearing usually take for granted. But as Mickey Mouse discovered in *Fantasia*, we don't really know how to control magic. And often, it gets out of hand. In Mickey's case, it was brooms carrying buckets of water. In the case of Michael Bloomfield, it was heroin – an all-too-common, unfortunate circumstance that still plagues the music business today.

There are two reasons I chose to write about a guitar player; either because I admire their style, or I'm convinced they deserve a place in my personal version of musical history. Guitar history, in particular. I try to refrain from delving into a person's private life, but at times the obvious must be faced. Bloomfield, a true pioneer from the musical '60s, fits both criteria. Unfortunately, he died from a heroin overdose. The magic that let him give back some of our American musical heritage also led him down an all-too-common path. As one who suffered insomnia all his life, Bloomfield fell easy prey to a drug that, much like it has now, had gained a subsocial acceptance. That is, of course, the negative side, unpleasant as it may be. But it's an important part of the magical puzzle of Bloomfield's life.

Bloomfield had a magnetism everybody seemed to notice. Born July 28, 1943, in Chicago, Illinois, the self-described social outcast got his first guitar at age 13. Though born to a wealthy family, by the time he was 14, he began to visit the blues clubs on Chicago's south side with his friend, Roy Ruby. Bloomfield was known to leap to the stage and ask if he could sit in, while simultaneously plugging in his guitar. He soon found a band of like-minded young players, including Paul Butterfield, Nick Gravenites, Charlie Musselwhite, and Elvin Bishop, frequenting the south side. Bloomfield began to search out older, forgotten bluesmen, playing and recording with Sleepy John Estes, Yank Rachell, Muddy Waters, Little Brother Montgomery and Big Joe Williams.

Along with becoming known as an up-and-coming guitarist, he was also a very gifted keyboard player. He did a lot of acoustic fingerstyle blues, learned from one of his early heroes, Blind Lemon Jefferson. He had also taken up slide guitar by this time and was managing a Chicago folk music club, the Fickle Pickle, and often hired older acoustic blues players for the Tuesday night blues sessions. Big Joe Williams memorialized those times in the song "Pick A Pickle," with the line "You know Mike Bloomfield...will always treat you right...come to the Pickle... every Tuesday night."

About that time, Bloomfield's guitar work as a session player caught the ear of legendary producer/talent scout John Hammond, Sr., who flew to Chicago and immediately signed him to a recording contract with CBS. As often happens in the magic kingdom, the record company didn't like the masters and declined to release any of the tracks, which were recorded by Bloomfield's band, including harp player Charlie Musselwhite. Bloomfield returned to playing clubs in Chicago, where he was approached by Paul Rothchild, producer of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band albums. Bloomfield was asked to play slide guitar and piano on early recordings (later released as *The Lost Elektra Sessions*), but they, too, were rejected for not fully capturing the sound of the band live.

More competitors than friends, Bloomfield remembered Butterfield this way, "I knew Paul, [and I] was scared of him." That being what it was, his contribution to the Butter Band provided Paul Butterfield with a musician of equal caliber. Between recording sessions with the Butter Band, Bloomfield backed up Bob Dylan on the classic *Highway 61 Revisited* album, and appeared with him at the Newport Folk Music Festival in 1965. This was the legendary concert where Dylan stunned the purist folk music crowd by playing electric rock and roll. The crowd booed Dylan, which probably did as much good for his career as anything could. After their great success/failure (however you see it), Bloomfield declined an offer from Dylan to join his touring band. Bloomfield and the Butter Band returned to the studio and, with the addition of pianist Mark Naftalin, finally captured their live sound on vinyl. Their second album, titled *East-West,* featured the Bloomfield composition, which ushered in an era of long, instrumental, psychedelic improvisations.

Bloomfield eventually left the Butterfield Blues Band in early 1967 to, in his own words, give original guitarist Elvin Bishop "...a little space." Theory has it he become uncomfortable with Butterfield's position as bandleader and wanted to lead his own group. He formed The Electric Flag with some old friends from Chicago. Barry Goldberg was on organ, bass player Harvey Brooks, singer and songwriter Nick Gravenites, and drummer Buddy Miles.

The band's official debut at the Monterey Pop Festival was well-received, but they quickly fell apart due to drugs, egos, and poor management. Bloomfield, always uncomfortable in a role as the guitar superstar, already weary of the road and suffering from his insomnia, took up permanent residence in San Francisco, where he got work doing scores for movies, includ-

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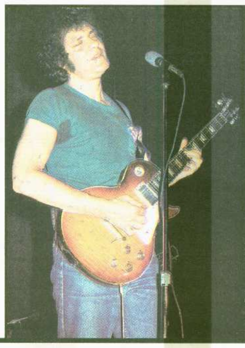
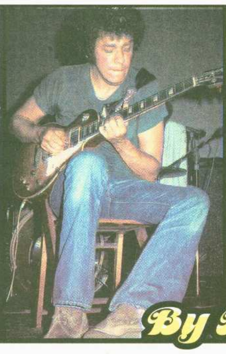
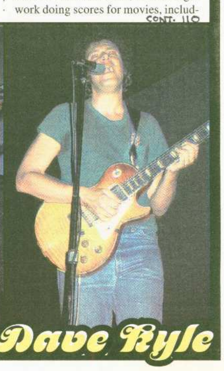






By Dave Hyle

ing *The Trip*, Andy Warhol's *Bad*, and porno films including *Sodom and Gamorrah*. He also began producing other artists and, as always, played studio sessions. One of those sessions was a remarkable record of the time. Keyboardist Al Kooper, who had previously worked with Bloomfield on the 1965 Dylan sessions, envisioned a session of jamming in the studio, much like the old Blue Note jazz label did with its artists. *Super Session*, the resulting release, with Bloomfield on side one and guitarist Stephen Stills on side two, once again thrust Bloomfield into the spotlight. Kooper's production and the improvisational nature of the recording session captured the Bloomfield sound. Although *Super Session* was the most successful recording of his career, Bloomfield, ever the purist, considered it a scam. He thought of it as an excuse to sell records, not pursuit of his real musical goals.

After a follow-up live album, he went back to San Francisco and lowered his visibility. In the '70s, he toured infrequently as Bloomfield And Friends (a group which usually included Mark Naftalin and Nick Gravenites) and played some gigs in the San Francisco

Bay area. He also occasionally helped out friends by lending his name to recording projects and business propositions. One was the ill-fated Electric Flag reunion in 1974, and the *KGB* album in 1976. In the mid '70s, Bloomfield recorded a number of albums with a more traditional blues focus for smaller record labels. Also during that time, he recorded an instructional album of various blues styles for *Guitar Player* magazine.

By the late '70s, Bloomfield's continuing drug and health problems caused the typical erratic behavior that goes along with the choices he made – missing gigs and alienating a number of his old associates. Bloomfield continued playing with other musicians, including Dave Shorey and Jonathan Cramer, and in the summer of 1980, he toured Italy with classical guitarist Woody Harris and cellist Maggie Edmondson. Frustrated that many people came to hear the *Super Sessions* music (which he felt he had left behind and often warned audiences not to expect those songs in the concerts), Bloomfield started doing solo gigs around the San Francisco area. He played his Silvertone archtop or his custom-made acoustic with the DeArmond, along with mandolin, banjo, piano or whatever else struck his fancy at the time. On November 15, 1980, Bloomfield joined his old friend, Bob Dylan, onstage at the Warfield Theater in San Francisco and jammed on "Like A Rolling Stone," the song they recorded together 15 years earlier. Three months later, on February 15, 1981, Bloomfield was found in his car, dead of a drug overdose.

Without a doubt, Bloomfield had an influence on music as we know it in this latter part of the 20th century. His electric guitar with Bob Dylan alone paved the way for groups like the Byrds, Crosby Stills & Nash, and Jackson Browne, just to name a few. Although first identified as a Telecaster player, he, along with Eric Clapton, turned the world on to the sound of flame-top Les Pauls built in the late '50s. Bloomfield was an adamant fan of Eric Clapton's sound, but again, he was the first to popularize the flame-top Les Pauls. Other British groups, the Rolling Stones for one, began their careers trying to duplicate the sounds Muddy Waters was making in Chicago, but Bloomfield brought the people who

Soul Tone from a Legend

Michael Bloomfield used a number of guitars in his career, and for a variety of reasons, they have become quite collectible. George Gruhn, one of the founders of the vintage industry, claims that Bloomfield's 1959 Sunburst Les Paul started the interest in these guitars. The golden period for Les Pauls, between 1957 and '59, produced some of the most desirable and collectible instruments ever made. Mike Bloomfield's use of the instrument, a nearly-forgotten fact, is the one that propelled this interest. Although Gruhn remembers Michael from the Chicago area, he remembers him not as a rock and roll icon, but as a folk-style acoustic player who also played a lot of Delta-style acoustic blues.

According to luthier/*VG* contributor George Manno, Bloomfield lost the '59 Burst in an interesting turn of events. He had agreed to play a concert in Canada for a promoter who was, let's say, leery of Bloomfield's reputation. Bloomfield offered his guitar as a sort of collateral for the event, never being one who was materially concerned. He told the promoter that if he did not show for the gig, he would give the man his guitar. You've already guessed; he didn't show. And the guitar went by the wayside.

But there were other guitars. He also had a '58, which had very little red in the sunburst, looking more like Gibson's modern honeyburst color. He also owned a 1960 model, and a '57 P-90 equipped goltop, too, which is now owned by Jim Beech of Chicago. Many pictures also show him with a white-guard Telecaster. Never one to obsess over the care of his guitars, it is reported that at one time he came to a session during a snow storm, with the Tele not even in a case. When he walked into the studio, the guitar had a little buildup of snow, so he knocked it off by banging the back of the guitar against a cast iron register.

There was also a Stratocaster in his history that bares closer examination. When Michael did the Bob Dylan session for "Like A Rolling Stone," Dylan supposedly gave him the Strat he used on the record. Bloomfield, in all his love and caring for instruments, had it painted a psychedelic purple! He ended up giving the guitar to Texas bluesman Johnny Winter, who had it refinished Candy Apple Red and retrofitted with a Gibson stop tailpiece. Johnny used this guitar to play slide, for a time. It is now owned by the Flynn Brothers of Chicago.

Paul Honeycutt was also able to shed some light on the various guitars Bloomfield used. "With Butterfield [he played] the rosewood-board Telecaster, the goldtop Les Paul with P-90s and fixed bridge ('55/'56?)," he said. "And the 'Burst that started it all, he got from Dan Erlewine of Stewart MacDonald (*VG*, January, '92). He played it with Butterfield and The Electric Flag. There's a story about the 'Burst being left with a club owner as a deposit when he was a no-show for a gig. There's a picture in the 'Burst Book that is supposed to be Michael's, but somehow I'm not convinced. I'd like to know where it is. It should be in the Hall of Fame. I have a reproduction of a Fender ad with The Electric Flag showing him with a sunburst Strat. I saw Michael play a black rosewood-board Strat through the '70s. I seem to remember a photo of Michael with black Les Paul Custom in *Guitar Player* magazine in the '70s. Wish I knew more. I'm a huge Bloomfield fan."

George Bretz was kind enough to let me borrow a couple of the old *Guitar Player* magazines from his collection, to research the subject. In the August '71 issue, part two of a Bloomfield interview shows only one picture. He is playing a goltop with soap bar pickups and a stop bridge/tailpiece. In that article (by Michael Brooks), Bloomfield talks about having a "...Les Paul and a Gibson double-cutaway (SG.)" When asked about amplifiers, he expressed his love for Fender Super Reverbs as well as Acoustic amplifiers "...for big gigs" (keep in mind, sound systems were antiquated by today's standards).

On the cover of the April '79 issue, he is holding a black Les Paul Custom, just as Paul Honeycutt remembered. Inside, Michael is pictured playing a Kay arch top while sitting on a bed surrounded by several guitars, including a black, rosewood-board '60s Strat; a custom-cutaway acoustic with a DeArmond pickup; a white-guard, maple-neck Tele; an arch-back mandolin; a Hilo Hawaiian guitar; and a student guitar with numbered frets, on which he is also shown playing sit-down style slide. In this article, he shows his string bending technique on the LP Custom. He is also shown playing a psychedelic painted, rosewood-board Tele with no pickguard. Tom Wheeler, author of the accompanying article said there were a couple of Twin Reverb amps in Michael's residence in Mill Valley, California. He also mentioned a modified tweed Fender Deluxe, a Martin tipple, a Bacon five-string banjo and a no-name six-string banjo, a Kay amplifier, and a '60s Fender Pro Reverb.

Tone-wise, Bloomfield set the standard guitar players are judged by today. One thing many players may be interested in is that in a lot of these photos, his pickup selector switch is in the front (neck) position. As we all know, a Telecaster can shatter fillings up to the third row when played on the back pickup with too much treble dialed in. I think a lot of players forget that just because that pickup is labeled "Rhythm" on certain guitars, it's okay to use it for a lead pickup, too! They also forget that the knob towards the back of Telecaster is a tone knob. That doesn't mean turn it all the way up for the most tone, either. Of course, the guitars Mike Bloomfield used are only a small part of the tone he produced. His fingers, and more importantly, his heart and soul, were responsible for most of it. If you haven't studied this very overlooked legend, you haven't finished your homework! VG

By Dave Ryle

or what. But whatever it is, this new one ain't close! But it's a beautiful guitar, and they did a good job on it.

But I just don't want to take that old one on the road anymore. I just want to keep it at home and use it in the studio. It's living on borrowed time and I know damn well, because usually you figure five years and the airlines or the thieves will get to it. That's been the average life expectancy of those guitars with me!

So anyway, I had one custom-built up for me, and then I bought another '59 down in Texas. I don't know if you know these guys...see if I can summon up the name for you...It's a vintage guitar shop up in Austin, down on Commerce Street, or maybe it was Commercial, but it starts with a C. Oh yeah! It was One World Guitars. His name was Gary, he was a hell of a nice guy. He gave me a real good price on it.

I've also got an old Martin I use on stage, I think it's a 00-18 or something. Anyway I've got it rigged up with a Dean Markley wooden pickup for my acoustic sets. It's a little beat up, but it's got a lot of character.

VG: So what was your first guitar?

EB: I started out with pawn shop Kays and Stellas. You know, the guitars with the strings an inch and a half off the neck! Well, I gave up two or three times before I finally said, "Yeah this may just hurt my fingers," but nobody else in my family played, and you can't find anybody in the neighborhood, you know. I was just stuck with a burnin' desire to play the blues. Like Bob Seeger said, "Workin' on a puzzle without any clues," you know?

VG: Who were you listening to back then?

EB: When I started out, all I could find was guys playin' folk music. This was the late '50s, you know? And wherever folk music would cross the blues, I would get somebody to show me about that. Some of these guys, remember, they were playin' in coffeehouses. Little guys wearin' beards and all. Some of them might be playin' Leadbelly or Big Bill Broonzy or something like that you know, and then I heard real blues like Jimmy Reed and Muddy Waters! I had one of those old radios...looked like a refrigerator! And Tulsa is flat and we got WLAC, Nashville, and a station in Freeport, and a station from Mexico and I really got into blues. I started going into the black part of town and hanging out at the record shops and buyin' the used ones off the jukeboxes from the colored joints. Then I got to Chicago and all hell busted loose!

VG: You got a moniker for your number one guitar?

EB: Red Dog...

VG: Where do you call home when you're not on the road?

EB: I've settled into Marin County, up north of San Francisco. I'm pretty much tryin' to have my cake and eat it too. This summer, we're pretty much just going out on weekends. I kinda took charge of my own bookings because I started feeling like I was being undervalued. You know, I've found that with over 47 odd years of experience that if you stick with just one agency, you're limited to their contacts and it's in their interest to book you for low money when they can't get good money. And a lot of times they don't have the nerve to ask for the good money!

I finally just said, "I'm worth a lot more than this," and contracted about five different agents, some specializing in fairs, some in rock festivals, and some that work different parts of the country. I said, "Don't even call me unless you get X dollars", and I jacked it way up! So far I'm getting away with it! I'm working every weekend and making twice the money I was before, and I get to spend the week back home with my family! I'm five miles from a good fishin' lake, I raise a big garden, got a beautiful wife and kids. No complaints! Every once in a while I fall over and cut myself up (referring to the stage monitor incident), but that's what I get for quitting drinking! When I was drunk, I never fell down...or if I did I didn't feel it!

VG: What about amplifiers? Looks like you're running some solidstate up on stage...

EB: Yeah, I like the tube amps, but they're kinda not roadworthy enough. Just the sight of these big husky guys at the airports that don't seem to know their own strength tossin' them around, you know? So I'm using the Fender Stage Lead now, or the numerical successor, the 112, I think. And this is the closest sound I can get to the tube effect I like.

I've got a Vibrolux I use in the studio, but I'm not really what you'd call a vintage guy. I really don't get fanatic about everything being genuine. Just like J. Geils, he's the opposite – he's really heavy into the vintage thing, but I just want it to sound good. That's all I care about.

J. Geils bought up a lap steel, and the guy was gonna charge him like $50 for a knob – a real knob – that was missing. There was a plastic one on it that worked, and I said, "That's good enough man," and he says, "well...okay," so I kinda talked him into it. But a month later he called and I said, "You snuck around and sent back there and got that $50 knob, didn't you?" And he said "Yeah!"

VG: Sometimes the quest for material perfection does go a little beyond functional need! Any particular string info you can pass on?

EB: .010, .013, .017, .032, .042, .052...

VG: What's the latest addition to your discography?

EB: *Ace In The Hole*, Alligator Records. Got another one I'm gonna get started on next month.

VG: Do you have a favorite song you look forward to each show?

EB: I like 'em all! What I try to do in life is have my cake and eat it, too. I just kinda look at the different things I'm interested in, and the things it looks like the public is interested in. You know, where we meet. And that's where I concentrate. The rest of the stuff, I do at home. If we both like it, we're there! VG

had invented this sound, like Muddy, into the clubs for fans to behold, first hand. Far from ready for retirement, many of them still feel a debt of gratitude to him for bringing their music forward. B.B. King has singled out Bloomfield for praise in helping him cross over to a white audience.

"I'm grateful...because to me, it seemed to open a few doors for us that seemed like they were never going to open," he said.

Yes, magic truly is a dangerous thing in the hands of mere mortals who underestimate its power. The fact he taught musicology at Stanford University is testament to his abilities, but as with all forms of sorcery, there can be good and bad elements at play.

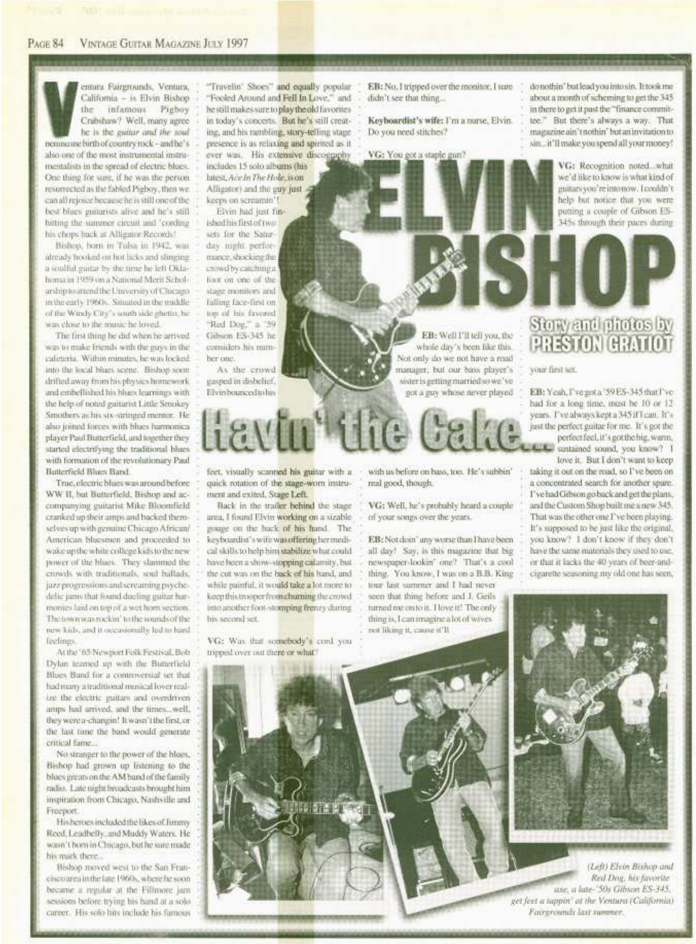
The good, in the case of Bloomfield, was all the joy and art he left us with in his recordings and performances. The bad, of course, is the fact he got caught up in the darker side of the magic no one ever sees sneaking up on their blind side. I don't mean to imply the music business is all bad, but to completely ignore the fact that drug addiction exists in the music world would be negligent. There are several lessons to be learned from his life, and maybe in these times of politicians arguing about whether to use marijuana as a medicine, we need to watch out for a larger, uglier, much more deadly demon.

Though this is just a brief overview of the musical life of Bloomfield, hopefully it has provided some a new guitar player to study. I also hope it has brought back some fond memories for those of us who were around, awaiting the next Guitar Messiah in the 1960s and '70s. Though he was less than fond of the record, *Super Sessions* is a benchmark for students of electric blues guitar and it still holds up very well today. I urge you all to go out and find some of this great musician's work. I don't think you'll be sorry.

Next Month: Remembering Michael Bloomfield.

A very special thanks to Steve Rusin and Fred Drumm for their pictures and memories of Bloomfield live at Indianapolis' Ravoli Theater in 1973. They reported Mark Naftalin was playing keys, and the bass player and drummer were local pickups. In mid-show, Bloomfield sat down on the edge of the stage and had an informal chat with the audience. They both claim it as a memorable night from an era where things were a little fuzzy, to say the least. Steve's photos from that evening provided inspiration for this article. A very special thanks to George Manno, George Gruhn, George Bretz, Dorothy Schinderman, Paul Honeycutt and Allen Bloomfield. Also, thanks to the Mike Bloomfield website: www.bluespower.com/arbn.htm

1997 July – Vintage Guitar, vol. 11 No. 10.
Article on Elvin Bishop



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ELVIN BISHOP

Havin' the Cake...

Story and photos by PRESTON GRATIOT

Ventura Fairgrounds, Ventura, California – is Elvin Bishop the infamous Pigboy Crabshaw? Well, many agree he is the *guitar and the soul* nenuncine birth of country rock – and he's also one of the most instrumental instrumentalists in the spread of electric blues. One thing for sure, if he was the person resurrected as the fabled Pigboy, then we can all rejoice because he is still one of the best blues guitarists alive and he's still hitting the summer circuit and 'cording his chops back at Alligator Records!

Bishop, born in Tulsa in 1942, was already hooked on hot licks and slinging a soulful guitar by the time he left Oklahoma in 1959 on a National Merit Scholarship to attend the University of Chicago in the early 1960s. Situated in the middle of the Windy City's south side ghetto, he was close to the music he loved.

The first thing he did when he arrived was to make friends with the guys in the cafeteria. Within minutes, he was locked into the local blues scene. Bishop soon drifted away from his physics homework and embellished his blues learnings with the help of noted guitarist Little Smokey Smothers as his six-stringed mentor. He also joined forces with blues harmonica player Paul Butterfield, and together they started electrifying the traditional blues with formation of the revolutionary Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

True, electric blues was around before WW II, but Butterfield, Bishop and accompanying guitarist Mike Bloomfield cranked up their amps and backed themselves up with genuine Chicago African/American bluesmen and proceeded to wake up the white college kids to the new power of the blues. They slammed the crowds with traditionals, soul ballads, jazz progressions and screaming psychedelic jams that found dueling guitar harmonies laid on top of a wet horn section. The town was rockin' to the sounds of the new kids, and it occasionally led to hard feelings.

At the '65 Newport Folk Festival, Bob Dylan teamed up with the Butterfield Blues Band for a controversial set that had many a traditional musical lover realize the electric guitars and overdriven amps had arrived, and the times...well, they were a-changin! It wasn't the first, or the last time the band would generate critical fame...

No stranger to the power of the blues, Bishop had grown up listening to the blues greats on the AM band of the family radio. Late night broadcasts brought him inspiration from Chicago, Nashville and Freeport.

His heroes included the likes of Jimmy Reed, Leadbelly, and Muddy Waters. He wasn't born in Chicago, but he sure made his mark there...

Bishop moved west to the San Francisco area in the late 1960s, where he soon became a regular at the Fillmore jam sessions before trying his hand at a solo career. His solo hits include his famous "Travelin' Shoes" and equally popular "Fooled Around and Fell In Love," and he still makes sure to play the old favorites in today's concerts. But he's still creating, and his rambling, story-telling stage presence is as relaxing and spirited as it ever was. His extensive discography includes 15 solo albums (his latest, *Ace In The Hole*, is on Alligator) and the guy just keeps on screamin'!

Elvin had just finished his first of two sets for the Saturday night performance, shocking the crowd by catching a foot on one of the stage monitors and falling face-first on top of his favored "Red Dog," a '59 Gibson ES-345 he considers his number one.

As the crowd gasped in disbelief, Elvin bounced to his feet, visually scanned his guitar with a quick rotation of the stage-worn instrument and exited, Stage Left.

Back in the trailer behind the stage area, I found Elvin working on a sizable gouge on the back of his hand. The keyboardist's wife was offering her medical skills to help him stabilize what could have been a show-stopping calamity, but the cut was on the back of his hand, and while painful, it would take a lot more to keep this trooper from churning the crowd into another foot-stomping frenzy during his second set.

VG: Was that somebody's cord you tripped over out there or what?

EB: No, I tripped over the monitor, I sure didn't see that thing...

Keyboardist's wife: I'm a nurse, Elvin. Do you need stitches?

VG: You got a staple gun?

EB: Well I'll tell you, the whole day's been like this. Not only do we not have a road manager, but our bass player's sister is getting married so we've got a guy whose never played with us before on bass, too. He's subbin' real good, though.

VG: Well, he's probably heard a couple of your songs over the years.

EB: Not doin' any worse than I have been all day! Say, is this magazine that big newspaper-lookin' one? That's a cool thing. You know, I was on a B.B. King tour last summer and I had never seen that thing before and J. Geils turned me onto it. I love it! The only thing is, I can imagine a lot of wives not liking it, cause it'll do nothin' but lead you into sin. It took me about a month of scheming to get the 345 in there to get it past the "finance committee." But there's always a way. That magazine ain't nothin' but an invitation to sin...it'll make you spend all your money!

VG: Recognition noted...what we'd like to know is what kind of guitars you're into now. I couldn't help but notice that you were putting a couple of Gibson ES-345s through their paces during your first set.

EB: Yeah, I've got a '59 ES-345 that I've had for a long time, must be 10 or 12 years. I've always kept a 345 if I can. It's just the perfect guitar for me. It's got the perfect feel, it's got the big, warm, sustained sound, you know? I love it. But I don't want to keep taking it out on the road, so I've been on a concentrated search for another spare. I've had Gibson go back and get the plans, and the Custom Shop built me a new 345. That was the other one I've been playing. It's supposed to be just like the original, you know? I don't know if they don't have the same materials they used to use, or that it lacks the 40 years of beer-and-cigarette seasoning my old one has seen,

(Left) Elvin Bishop and Red Dog, his favorite axe, a late-'50s Gibson ES-345, get feet a tappin' at the Ventura (California) Fairgrounds last summer.

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1997 August – Vintage Guitar, vol. 11 No. 11.
Article "Remembering Michael Bloomfield" Advertised in No. 10.

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2000 – Promotional booklet for the book: If you love these blues – An oral history.
15 pages. Included a 3-track promo CD.

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2002 Dec. 1 – Newsletter No. 1 – Bloomfield content, but very interesting reading anyway!

Welcome to the first of what will be a series of weekly newsletters from George Gruhn of Gruhn Guitars. Please feel free to call me or the Gruhn staff at 615-256-2033 from 9:30 to 5:30 central time Monday through Saturday or email us at gruhn@gruhn.com with any of your questions or comments. We will be happy to give you personal attention. Your comments and questions are critically important to us for it is only through feedback from the public that we know what is going on out there and what we need to do to best serve your needs.

Gruhn Guitars Incorporated is essentially a hobby of mine that got out of hand and became a business. When I started collecting guitars in 1963, I had no intention of starting a business or of becoming a dealer. I was looking for guitars, banjos, and mandolins which personally suited me. At that time the so-called folk boom was in full swing and the demand for fretted instruments had picked up dramatically. As a student at the University of Chicago I gained my primary exposure to the music through the University of Chicago Folklore Society. The Society sponsored many concerts on campus and also was in close contact with similar organizations at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

It was through the Folklore Society members that I gained my first exposure to musicians who favoured vintage instruments over new ones. Even in the early 1960's these players realized that the new instruments available at that time were not equivalent to the fine pre World War II acoustic vintage instruments. The old ones looked, felt, and sounded better. While prices at that time were remarkably low compared to the standards of today, the higher grade instruments such as pre World War II Martin dreadnoughts, F-5 Gibson mandolins of the 1920's, and flat-head pre-World War II Mastertone Gibson banjos were extremely rare and hard to find. Unlike the present time there were no guitar shows, Internet, magazines such as Vintage Guitar, or even books or articles

about vintage instruments to provide information. Most music stores were so-called full line stores which might have a few guitars interspersed with band and orchestra instruments and pianos, but there were virtually no guitar specialty shops and virtually no vintage instrument dealers with the exception of Lundberg Stringed Instruments in Berkeley, California, Fretted Instruments in Greenwich Village in New York City, and The Fret Shop in Chicago near the university I attended.

When I first started out there was a demand for vintage fretted acoustic instruments but virtually no market for vintage electric guitars. It was not until about 1965 that I encountered any people looking for specifically for used and vintage electric guitars. In fact, the first band I encountered using such instruments was the Butterfield Blues Band with Mike Bloomfield. When I first met Mike he was strictly an acoustic player, but it was not long before he joined the Butterfield Band and played an old Telecaster. 1950's Teles, particularly those with the black pickguards, went almost overnight from $75 items which were not in demand to $600 which at that time was an astronomical amount since it was much more than the cost of a new one. Mike amply demonstrated, however, that the old Telecaster was a remarkably different instrument from the new one. Soon thereafter Mike switched to a 1954 Gold top Les Paul, and these instruments promptly went from being $75 used guitars for which there was no demand to selling for $500 to $800. At that time there were no new Les Pauls. This was the first time I had seen players going out of their way to find electric guitar models which were out of production. I can vividly remember that during the period when Mike was playing his 1954 Gold Top, the demand for these instruments not only skyrocketed but players were looking specifically for one like Mike's rather than any other variation. When I found gold tops with the stud mounted bridge, I could sell them or trade them readily for acoustic guitars which were of interest to me, but if I found a sunburst Les Paul with humbucking pickups and the tune-o-matic bridge, I was told that that was the wrong color, that humbucking pickups sounded syrupy and sickly sweet, and that the tune-o-matic bridge killed sustain. It was not long after that, however, that Mike switched to using a sunburst, and the players who had claimed that those were the wrong instruments could not remember having said such a thing within a few weeks after Bloomfield had made the transition. In my opinion, Mike Bloomfield did more than anyone else to start the vintage electric guitar market. Although he never made a hit record which sold millions of copies to the public and was no longer particularly influential after the late 1960's, he was idolized by guitar players of the day and did more than anyone else I know to introduce R&B and vintage electric guitars to the white audience. I feel privileged to have known him well.

As I stated earlier, dealing guitars was almost an accidental occurrence for me. My goal was to find instruments which suited me personally. The good guitars, banjos, and mandolins, while inexpensive during the early and mid 1960's, were still hard to find. Pre World War II D-45's, for example, regardless of the price are in limited supply since only 91 were made, and sunburst Les Pauls similarly were hard to find at any price since only about 1700 were made. Even if they had been available free, finding one would be a challenge since these few instruments were spread worldwide and were not generally available in music stores. It became an obsession for me to check for instruments in pawn shops, music stores, newspaper ads, and school bulletin boards. I was a full time student with a limited budget. My parents had been willing to buy me my first guitar, but after that I was on my own. I quickly found, however, that for every guitar I found which suited me personally, I would run across fifty or more great deals on pieces I didn't want for my own collection but which I could sell or trade for a profit. When I would go into a music store or pawn shop or check classified ads looking specifically for pre World War II Martin guitars, old Gibson mandolins, and pre World War II Gibson and Vega five string banjos, I would find that for every one of these I would encountered there might be fifty or more great deals on both electric and acoustic instruments which I could either trade or resell for a profit but which I did not have any desire to keep for myself. I would purchase these instruments not with any real intention of becoming a dealer but because the only way I could afford to support my hobby was to sell or trade instruments such as these to get the ones I wanted. I always had five or six guitars in my dorm room. Later I had an apartment near campus and had part of my bedroom filled with instruments. By the time I was in my second year of graduate school studying zoology and animal behaviour psychology, I had one bedroom stacked with guitar cases at least three feet deep.

In 1970 I joined with a partner, Tut Taylor and our one employee, Randy Wood to set up GTR Incorporated in Nashville, Tennessee. The initials stood for George, Tut, and Randy and also were an abbreviation for guitar. The partnership with Tut lasted only nine months, but Randy stayed with me for almost three years doing repair and custom building. The shop was located across the alley from the stage door of the Ryman Auditorium which housed the Grand Ole Opry through 1974. The company name was changed to Gruhn Guitars Incorporated in 1976. Today we are in our third building, but we never moved over one hundred feet from the first location and are in fact today located directly next door to where we started, although the first building has long since been torn down.

Back in 1970 when I first opened up the store, I was one of the very few vintage guitar dealers in the world. Guitar Player magazine was the only guitar related magazine I knew of. There were virtually no articles on the subject of vintage guitars, and there were certainly no books available on the subject. Prices of vintage instruments were much higher than when I had started out in 1963, but were still ridiculously low by the standards of today. New instruments from Martin, Gibson, Fender, Gretsch, and other American manufacturers during the early to mid 1970's were nowhere near the quality that could be found with vintage guitars. Many of

the musicians of that time chose to play vintage instruments not because they were interested in collector's items but because the new ones of the day simply did not suit them. The 1970's were a low point in quality for virtually all manufactured goods ranging from guitars to automobiles to furniture and most other consumer goods. While there was clearly a demand at this time for better quality instruments, the major manufacturers were concentrating on mass production rather than recreating the quality of their 'golden era', and there were virtually no small boutique manufacturers or hand builders on the scene. I used to joke that if I lost a finger on my left hand for each good hand builder of instruments that could rival guitars made by Martin, Gibson, Fender, or Guild, I would still have at least as many usable digits as Django Reinhardt and could still play a tune. Needless to say, times have changed. Today the Guild of American Luthiers has over three thousand members and the Association of Stringed Instrument Artisans also has several thousand. Even if only a small percentage of these members are producing good guitars, the total still is considerable.

The market has evolved dramatically over the years. Today there are numerous guitar specialty shops and vintage instrument dealers who advertise on the Internet, in a variety of vintage instrument magazines, and attend hundreds of guitar shows. The traditional large scales manufacturers like Martin, Gibson, and Fender have greatly improved their quality over what they offered in the 1970's and have been joined by numerous competitors such as Paul Reed Smith, Taylor, Larrivee, Santa Cruz, and Collings which compete in the marketplace. The variety and number of makers producing high quality guitars today is greater than at any other time in the history of the instrument. While I am firmly of the opinion that the 1920's and 1930's were the golden era of acoustic guitar production and the 1950's can be said to be the golden era of electric guitar production, the major manufacturers today as well as numerous smaller companies and hand builders are producing guitars which are indisputably of fine quality and are eminently suitable for professional use on stage or in the studio. This is a remarkable contrast to a time when I first opened my store when if one wanted a good instrument suitable for professional use one was limited to vintage instruments since the new ones simply weren't good enough.

Over the years that I have been involved, vintage instruments have been a great investment. There have been times when they have gone up dramatically in price and I have seen some periods such as from 1976 through the early 1980's when prices seemed to stabilize, but in the entire time I have been involved with guitars I have never seen prices crash. 2003 will mark forty years since I bought my first guitar and started dealing instruments. I have been at it long enough to see sunburst Les Pauls go from a market price of $100 to having premium quality ones with beautifully figured curly maple tops selling for well over $100,000. Some instruments which I sold for $400 to $500 when I first opened my shop in 1970 would today bring well over $20,000. Although instruments such as old Les Pauls, Telecasters, Stratocasters, pre World War II Martin D-28's, pre World War II flat head Mastertones, and Loar signed F-5's receive a great deal of attention due to their astronomical prices, it is worth noting that many very fine vintage models are still readily available today at prices no more than and in some cases less than comparable new instruments. Vintage instruments as well as some used recent issue instruments and carefully selected new instruments have the potential to be excellent investments for the future. The stock market and other investments have been far less stable over the years than the fretted instrument market. Especially in the past couple of years when many stocks have lost more than half their value, the fretted instrument market by contrast looks like a safe haven. Most fretted instruments during the past couple of years have either been very stable in value or have gone up. Some, such as Loar signed F-5 mandolins made from 1922 through 1924, have doubled in the past couple of years. Guitars, banjos, and mandolins have the added appeal over stocks and bonds that they are beautiful pieces of art and are great fun to play.

I look forward to your comments and questions and will do my best to personally respond to every one of them.

Sincerely,
George Gruhn

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2006. February 12 – CHICAGO SUN TIMES Entertainment
Burning for the blues
BY JEFF JOHNSON STAFF REPORTER

Live fast, die young, leave a great-sounding body of work.
It's the stuff musical legends are made of. Janis, Jimi, Jim ... and Chicago's own guitar god, Michael Bloomfield, at one time America's answer to Clapton, Page and Beck.

Bloomfield was found dead in his car of a drug overdose at age 36 in San Francisco 25 years ago this Wednesday. In the short version – woefully inadequate, as all such summaries of a life tend to be – years of excessive doping and drinking reduced him to a trivia answer. Question: Who played guitar with Bob Dylan at Newport and on the "Highway 61 Revisited" sessions? And even more important in the grand musical scheme: Whose axmanship changed the course of rock 'n' roll by taking electric Chicago blues from the South and West Side clubs to the masses?

“Some people are just naturals,” says blues legend B.B. King, whose success with mainstream audiences stemmed in part from the efforts of Bloomfield and his peers to promote the blues originators. “Mike was a wonderful young man and a great guitarist.”

“He touched a chord with a lot of guitarists,” explains Allen Bloomfield, the brother 18 months his junior who lovingly oversees the musical estate and monitors the site www.mikebloomfield.com. “There’s a certain passion he evokes and a certain tone that resonates in the hearts in the people. He left a small body of work, but the people who hear it are captivated by it. He was one of the first to embrace a completely different culture than the one he grew up in. He found an acceptance with [bluesmen such as Muddy Waters and Otis Spann] that he wasn’t able to find at home.

“The myth sometimes is even more romantic than the man himself.”

It was true of Robert Johnson and true of Bloomfield, kindred blues spirits who each heard the hellhounds on their trail. Bloomfield was a hyperkinetic, rebellious youth who ran the bustling streets of the city’s North Side. Then the Bloomfields relocated to hoity-toity Glencoe, where young Mike never fit in, despite coming from a well-to-do family. He formed various bands during his high school years at New Trier. Guitarist Jim Schwall, a high school classmate who later formed the Siegel-Schwall Band with Corky Siegel, played in one of those early groups.

“Mike was way ahead of everybody else.” Schwall said. “Most of us were involved in the folk revival of the ‘50s, and when we got bored with that, we found roots music. Mike took a more direct route. He was listening to obscure guys like Smokey Hogg when I met him. I was listening to the acoustic blues players, so having him spin down-home electric blues records were enlightening.”

A talent show called Lagniappe hastened the end of Bloomfield’s New Trier career. “They told him, ‘Under no circumstances can you take an encore,’ “Allen recalls. “Of course he took an encore; shortly afterward, he was kicked out. My parents sent him to a private school, the Cornwall Academy, where everybody was a f---up with discipline problems. It was probably there where he first got into dope and other stuff. He was thrown right into the briar patch.”

That didn’t stunt Bloomfield’s growth as a guitarist. By the early 1960s, he was ready to strut his stuff before white audiences at the dawn of the North Side blues movement and sit in with postwar Chicago blues kingpins such as Waters and Howlin’ Wolf in South Side clubs.

Abe “Little Smokey” Smothers, who was giving guitar lessons to Bloomfield’s future bandmate Elvin Bishop, says Bloomfield “learned a whole lot faster than Elvin. Mike was a fast learner. They used to come down to where I was playing at Oakwood and Drexel at the Blue Flame Club. From the Blue Flame, they started going to Pepper’s to listen to Muddy.” Smothers praises Bloomfield by acknowledging, “He played pretty good for a white boy.”

The North Shore millionaire’s kid found a running mate in Mississippi-born harmonica ace Charlie Musselwhite, his Near North Side neighbor. Bloomfield had an apartment in Carl Sandburg Village, while Musselwhite and acoustic blues veteran Big Joe Williams rented rooms in back of a record shop.

“Down the street was a little neighborhood bar named Big John’s,” Musselwhite recalls. “Over the Fourth of July, they thought it would be nice to have some folk music and asked Joe to play. I played harp with him. They did great business and asked Joe, ‘Can you come back tomorrow?’ It turned into a regular gig. Mike came down and saw an old upright piano and asked if he could play that. He came back for the next six months. Joe couldn’t stay in someplace too long, so he left. Mike and I kept the gig going, and we got a bass player and a drummer.

“People really responded to live electric blues. We told the owners, ‘Why don’t you get people like Howlin’ Wolf and Muddy Waters?’ So on nights we didn’t play, they got blues bands from the South Side to come up and play. Other bars saw they were doing great business, and they hired them, too.”

Bloomfield and Musselwhite moved on to a better-paying gig at Magoo’s, and their partner in their nocturnal blues forays, Paul Butterfield, took their place at Big John’s. Butterfield had been playing at Hyde Park sorority parties before landing the North Side gig. The two kept their residency at Magoo’s for a year, until their workload – seven sets a night, from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. – became so grueling they gave it up.

Meanwhile, in New York, the Paul Butterfield Blues Band landed a deal with Elektra. They were recording while Bloomfield and Musselwhite were in the Big Apple to cut an album for Columbia, and producer Paul Rothchild urged Butterfield to add Bloomfield to the lineup.

After two Butterfield albums, Bloomfield grew restless. He formed the Electric Flag, promoted by Columbia Records as “an American music band” and as a supergroup with horns. Bloomfield envisioned the group as a

Stax-Volt-inspired R&B outfit. The band included his Chicago pals Nick Gravenites on rhythm guitar and vocals and Barry Goldberg on keyboards, as well as Buddy Miles on drums and vocals.

The Flag debuted at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 to overwhelming response, according to Norman Dayron, Bloomfield's producer for nearly 20 years and close friend.

"I was there in '67, and they weren't talking about Jimi Hendrix or Janis Joplin, they were talking about the Electric Flag," Dayron asserts. "Their performance blew the house down, and everybody was hailing him as the genius of all time."
Bloomfield kept the band together for 18 months and one fine album, "A Long Time Comin'." When he began blowing off gigs and finally blew up the original lineup, the Flag did one more LP under Miles' leadership.

Session ace Al Kooper sold Columbia on the "Super Session" jam-record concept as a showcase for Bloomfield's guitar. Then, despite super sales, Bloomfield rejected "Super Session" and the subsequent "Live Adventures" disc as a scam. But Kooper defends those ventures.

"We had no expectations for sales on this album, and when it dented the Top 10 and outsold Butterfield, the Blues Project [Kooper's answer to the Electric Flag] and the Flag, he was actually embarrassed. The son of a wealthy man, he had turned to the blues world to rebel against his real world. On 'Super Session,' we outsold the blues world, and that surprised both of us.

"On 'Live Adventures,' the timing was not great for Michael healthwise and his playing suffered. Another live recording from that time period, from the Fillmore East, went missing for 30 years. As soon as it was located, I went to work on it. Michael's playing is amazing. I released that in 2002 as 'The Lost Concert.' It kind of makes up for 'Live Adventures.' "

There are two schools of thought on Bloomfield's last years. Musselwhite and others believe he became stuck in a creative morass, made worse by drug use and distaste for the "business" end of the music business. A few, including Dayron, think he did some of his finest playing in the '70s for Tacoma and other specialty labels.

There's universal agreement, though, that his biggest commercial endeavors of the decade, the Electric Flag reunion of 1974 and MCA Records' 1975 "supergroup," KGB, were ill-advised efforts to cash in on the Bloomfield mystique. Such commercial projects were painful for Bloomfield.

"Michael said he had a wire running from ear to ear that would become red hot," Dayron says. "He couldn't hold a band together because his ideas were so revolutionary and so hot. When he got frustrated, he would turn to his favorite thing – watching the Johnny Carson show. One time he was booked to play for 3,000 people in Vancouver. The Carson show was on the same time, so he didn't go on. Michael walked out, left four guitars behind and checked into a motel that had a TV before flying home."

Musselwhite visited Bloomfield a few times at his San Francisco home, "but he'd gotten way off into heroin. It was like he was lost. I remember him saying his dream was to be an English baron with a castle, land and all the heroin he wanted. He might have had some kind of chemical imbalance. One time we drove from New York to Chicago, and all the way he'd be spitting out the car window. When we got back, I saw all the paint had been eaten away on the side of the car from his spitting."

Allen Bloomfield maintains that his brother was bipolar, and might have survived had psychiatry known more then about the disorder. His death on Feb. 15, 1981, saddened but did not surprise his friends. His body was found in his car in a San Francisco neighborhood where one of his heroin connections lived, though he officially died of an overdose of cocaine, a drug he never used. Speculation was that his dealer tried to revive him after a heroin overdose with a shot of cocaine, and when that failed, they dumped his body in the car.

But like Big Joe, Robert and his other heroes, Mike Bloomfield lived and died the life of a real bluesman. And like the great rockers of his generation, he soared musically because he refused to conform to the earthbound notions of the less creatively gifted.

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WHAT'S GOING ON?
APT Films in London has taken on option on Michael Bloomfield: If You Love These Blues, a 2000 oral history, with the goal of making a feature-length film on Bloomfield's life.

While that project may be years down the road, San Francisco filmmaker Robert Sarles and his Raven Productions have already completed as many as 20 interviews with those closest to Bloomfield for an upcoming documentary.

Bloomfield's old "Super Session" partner Al Kooper keeps the musical legacy alive through a series of recent tribute gigs with his Rekooperators band, which includes Jimmy Vivino and Mike Merritt from Conan O'Brien's band and Anton Fig from David Letterman's show.

Bloomfield's recorded legacy should be enhanced with the planned release of recordings from the Fillmore East and West archives, as well as what's expected to be the definitive box set of Bloomfield's material, including his lesser-known work for Tacoma and other indies.

And at least one fan is working to rename the street in front of his boyhood home at 424 W. Melrose "Michael Bloomfield Way," although Bloomfield's brother Allen admits that the local alderman is not entirely sold on the idea.
Jeff Johnson

Music
Bloomers and Butter: true pioneers
2006 February 12,

BY JEFF JOHNSON STAFF REPORTER

To call the first Paul Butterfield Blues Band album "groundbreaking" is an understatement. The band featured a young, white leader with slicked-back hair whose harp playing conjured Big Walter and Little Walter, two take-no-prisoners guitarists in Michael Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop who could trade leads with the greatest of ease, and an older, African-American rhythm section of drummer Sam Lay and bassist Jerome Arnold who cut their teeth in Howlin' Wolf's band.

Bloomers and Butter -- the "Born in Chicago" boys -- and their bandmates inspired a generation of young players as diverse as Carlos Santana, George Thorogood and Jorma Kaukonen with their muscular blues sound. It was a respectable re-creation of the Delta blues that previously had been confined largely to the South and West Sides.

"It was a matter of being in the right place at the right time with the right stuff," Bishop says. "There was this great big huge body of music, the blues, and this great big potential audience in the United States for this non-white music. The Butterfield Band was there to deliver it. People will accept something from somebody who looks more like them. It's a sad but true fact. We weren't playing it as well as our idols, Muddy [Waters] and Wolf."

After the successful debut LP, Bloomfield's restless soul wouldn't sit still for another straight-ahead Chicago blues album, so he found a way to incorporate world-music influences in the second Butterfield Band disc, "East-West."

"He would try stuff nobody else would do," Bishop says. "We listened to [John] Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders and Ravi Shankar. Bloomers figured out how to play that stuff within a blues band."

For such an accomplished guitarist, Bloomfield also put a premium on showmanship, as was evident in his "fire-eating act" when the band performed "East-West" live.

"We did that at least 20 minutes live, and halfway through the song, he'd get this thing out that you'd beat a kettle drum with and dip it in lighter fluid," Bishop recalls. "He said the secret was, 'Don't inhale.' We did this at the old Fillmore [West] Theater, and for all these hippies who were stoned on acid, it was a real mind-blower. People went crazy. He was the type of guy who'd do that."

Blues harpist Charlie Musselwhite marvels at his old pal Bloomfield's affinity for working a crowd. "I didn't care for being in front of people, and one time I mentioned that to Mike, and he said that for him, there was nothing greater than being in front of a roomful of people all looking at him," he says. "He thrived on that." His flair for entertaining extended to parlor tricks, Musselwhite says. "He could take razor blades and chew them up and spit 'em out, and he'd put out lit cigarettes on his tongue. If he was reading a book, he'd tear out the page and eat it when he finished it. And he had a photographic memory. I could open a book and tell him a page number, and he'd quote word for word from that particular page."

Bloomfield's departure from Butterfield was evolutionary, Bishop maintains. "I think with both his split and my split, it wasn't any violent argument like you read about in the tabloids," he says. "It was a guy who played in a band and did his part and thought, 'Wouldn't it be great to play all the songs that I choose rather than two or three songs?' "

After Bloomfield went off to form the Electric Flag, Butterfield soon added horns in his group. And Butterfield

joined Bloomfield on Waters' "Fathers & Sons" project in 1969. Butterfield struggled with alcoholism while continuing to perform until his own death at age 44 in 1987. (SIC!!)

2006 February 12, 2006 - **When Bloomfield met Bob**

BY JEFF JOHNSON STAFF REPORTER

Bob Dylan met Michael Bloomfield in Chicago in 1963 and quickly resolved to play with the brilliant guitarist. Two years later, Bloomfield joined Dylan for the "Highway 61 Revisited" sessions that yielded "Like a Rolling Stone," the namesake magazine's choice as greatest rock song of all time. He also backed up Dylan at the historic Newport Folk Festival when the folk god "went electric."

Al Kooper recalls attending the "Highway 61" session as a 21-year-old studio guitarist. "I was quite ambitious and decided I would try and play on the session. So I got there early, and set up and sat there as if I had been hired. In come Dylan and Bloomfield together. Bloomfield sits down next to me, says hello and begins to warm up on a cream-colored Telecaster. I was aghast. I had *never* heard anyone play live like that, much less a white person approximately my own age. As soon as possible, I packed up my guitar and went into the control room where I belonged."

Bloomfield's contribution went beyond his guitar work, says producer Norman Dayron, who was there for that session. "He was the music director for that band," he says. "He arranged 'Like a Rolling Stone' -- Dylan didn't do that."

In November 1980, singer Maria Muldaur and Dylan visited Bloomfield at his San Francisco home, and Dylan invited him to sit in at the Warfield Theater the next night. Bloomfield told Dayron, who encouraged him to take him up on it.

"Bob gave about a 10-minute introduction to these young people about how much Michael meant to him and what a genius he was," Dayron recalls. "He called him 'one of the rare geniuses of American music who had given me his sound.' Michael shuffles onstage wearing sheepskin worn-out bedroom slippers with the heels scrunched up and jeans with the knees ripped out. He had on a football T-shirt from the high school in Mill Valley where he lived. He picked up a borrowed guitar and in my view played brilliantly the entire evening."

It was Bloomfield's last live appearance. Three months later, he was dead.
(ED. It is obvious that Dayron was not in the house that night. Bloomfield played only on two numbers, and it was not the last live appearance, and Bob Dylan didn't speak for 10 min. (only 2 min.) but that is longer than we are used to from him. The Dylan quote is also wrong. See above for Nov. 15, 1980)

Jeff Johnson

2007 –Uncut Magazine – The Stars That Fame Forgot

THE STARS THAT FAME FORGOT

Mike Bloomfield

Like a rolling stone: the guitar hero who turned his back on fame – and Dylan

"Suddenly Dylan exploded through the doorway and in tow was this bizarre-looking guy carrying a Fender Telecaster without a case, which was weird, because it was the dead of winter and the guitar was all wet from rain and snow. But he just shuffled over into the corner, wiped it off, plugged in and commenced to play some of the most incredible guitar I'd ever heard." **Al Kooper, on the *Highway 61 Revisited* sessions.**

That guy was Michael Bloomfield, the single most ferocious guitarist to appear on the American scene in the early '60s. A Jewish suburbanite perfectly at home in the cut-throat environs of Chicago's blues-drenched Southside, Bloomfield was perhaps the first white kid to inhabit the quintessential rock'n'roll archetype of lone-wolf guitarslinger. And during his 1964-'68 prime, his influence hung heavy over every corner of the music world.

Bloomfield was born in Chicago in 1943 into a wealthy family. He was a poor student but, given his first guitar at age 13, he was transfixed. At 15, he began lurking around the fringes of the Chicago scene, appearing with Sun rockabilly Hayden Thompson. Still, it was hardnosed electric R'n'B - Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Little Walter - that drew Bloomfield in.

By his late teens, Bloomfield was watching Elmore James, Sonny Boy Williamson and Earl Hooker perform at high-voltage clubs like Pepper's and The Pride & Joy. He was appearing solo, too, playing Lightnin' Hopkins tunes to all-black audiences. The novelty of a white teenager holding court among the grizzled veterans initially drew mocking giggles, but he soon won respect.

"He wasn't too good when I first noticed him," Muddy Waters told Ed Ward for his fine bio, *The Rise And Fall Of An American Guitar Hero*. "But he got good." So much so that, as the '60s progressed, he played with everyone from Howlin' Wolf to Chuck Berry.

"I just want to play the blues..." Dylan's spotlight-shunning guitarslinger, Mike Bloomfield

The finest early document of Bloomfield's gritty, teeth-rattling style is a frantic five-song session produced by the legendary John Hammond. Recorded late 1964 (and collected on Legacy's *Don't Say That I Ain't Your Man!*), it preserves Bloomfield's wiry, house-on-fire leads of mighty intensity and command. Just 21, he was poised to push R'n'B purism into pop's suddenly malleable mainstream.

But for all Bloomfield's dues-paying, it was Dylan's invitation to play on *Highway 61 Revisited* that pushed him into fame's spotlight. The sessions were disorganised, which suited Bloomfield's mercurial style fine. "I only have one rule," Dylan is quoted as telling him: "I don't want any of that BB King shit."

Out of the chaos came immortality. *Highway 61*, brilliant in tone, texture, and composition, was a cultural watershed, arguably defined as much by Bloomfield's growling guitar as Dylan's sneering vocals. His coiled leads linking verses of "Like A Rolling Stone" and controlled caterwauls in "Tombstone Blues" are among the most thrilling guitar lines ever committed to vinyl.

Duly offered a slot in Dylan's band, though, Bloomfield declined. He opted to stick with a more modest gig ("I just want to play the blues," he announced) with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

Bloomfield's most fertile period followed: a two-album stint with Butterfield, the ambitious soul/funk experimentation of The Electric Flag, and the celebrated *Super Session* with Kooper. The Butterfield Band's 1966 "East-West" - a visionary tour de force blending blues, jazz and raga - marks Bloomfield's creative peak.

Super Session, a commercial smash, seemed to be a perfect outlet for showcasing Bloomfield's screaming, note-bending style. But Kooper opined that its sales numbers clashed with Bloomfield's ideological view of the blues as rebel music, while Bloomfield simply called the record a scam.

By 1969, Bloomfield was scurrying away from the mainstream. He hated touring, and suffered from crippling insomnia and drug problems. Retiring to Mill Valley, California, he laid low, playing informal gigs, producing sessions for Otis Rush and James Cotton, scoring porno films, and devotedly watching Johnny Carson on TV.

A string of '70s projects - including several woeful supergroup efforts - depict a floundering talent, albeit one capable of occasional rallies. Fittingly, his last significant stage appearance had him reviving his "Like A Rolling Stone" guitar lines as Dylan's guest at 'Frisco's Warfield Theatre in 1980. Three months later, Bloomfield was found slumped dead in his car, lethal drug quantities in his body. He was 37. LUKE TORN

UNDER THE INFLUENCE...

"I was playing in a club in Chicago, and a guy came down and said that he played guitar. He just played circles around anything I could play"
Bob Dylan, introducing Bloomfield, Nov 15, 1980

Bloomfield's super sessions on CD...

MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD Essential Blues 1964-1969: Don't Say That I Ain't Your Man!
COLUMBIA/LEGACY
★★★★
...including the seminal 1964 John Hammond session, Bloomfield's genius concentrated into 15 explosive minutes.

BOB DYLAN Highway 61 Revisited + The Bootleg Series Vol 1-3
COLUMBIA
★★★★★
For Bloomfield at his wildest, crank up the wicked, maniacal lead on *Highway 61* outtake, "Sitting On A Barbed-Wire Fence".

MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD/ AL KOOPER/ STEPHEN STILLS Super Session SONY/LEGACY
★★★★
The mother of all jam records, with some unearthly guitar/keyboard interplay (highlight: the Howard Tate hit, "Stop").

THE PAUL BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND Golden Butter
ELEKTRA
★★★★
Useful double-LP round-up of the Butterfield Band's best moments, including "East-West".

REISSUE LP!

200? – from ?
Crosstown Traffic – Chicagos blue eyed R&B sound.
Part One: Tired and Busted – Mike Bloomfield's Early Years.

An article by Jack Morton.

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2007 Apr. 21 & 28 - Mike Bloomfield interviewed by Dan McClosky, Mill Valley, CA June 1971 508
with new commentary by Dan McClosky as prensented on "Blues by the Bay" KFPA 94,1
Berkeley, CA. Hosted by Tom Mazzolini. CDR-2

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2007. July 28 **– Bloomfield Birthday Tribute** 509
A two hour radio show from "Back Porch" hosted by Chris Cowles on WRTC-FM 89,3 Trinity College, Hartford, CT. It's an annual celebration.

Interviews with Harvey Brooks, photographer Deborah Chesher who recently published a coffee table photo book called: Everybody I shot, is dead.

Plus: Harvey Brooks "View from the Bottom" on You Tube.

Plus: Deborah Chesher also from CHML AM900, Toronto, January 3, 2008 and on "Walking on Air with Betsy and Sal" on WGN AM720, Chicago January 7, 2008.

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2007. Oct. 29. – Interview with Nick Gravenites on WFDU.FM 510

Gravenites interviewed (on telephone) by Richy Harps & Johnny T. in "Across the Tracks" WFDU-FM 89,1 Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, NJ.

Gravenites talks about his days with Paul Butterfield from the late 50's to 1965. "Born in Chicago" from BBB's first album had – to start with - Butterfield's name as writer instead of Gravenites'. Also about: His first single on "Out of Sight" Records. Electric Flag. Albert Grossman. Paul Butterfield "Bunky". Muddy Waters and many other things.

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2007 Nov. – Bob Dylan at the Newport Folk Festival 511
A PBS radio documentary prod. by Joyride Media. Hosted by Rita Houston –
Producers: Paul Chuffo & Joshua Jackson – featuring songs from DVD:
Bob Dylan: The Other Side of the Mirror – Live at Newport Folk Festival 1963-65.
Columbia Legacy DVD 88697 14466-9

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2013.09. Rolling Stone

ROCK & ROLL

How Rock & Roll Got the Blues

DOCUMENTARY Film tells the story of young rockers who worshipped Sixties bluesmen

IN THE EARLY SIXTIES, A GROUP of white kids in Chicago – including guitarists Michael Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop, harp player Paul Butterfield and keyboardist Barry Goldberg – fell in love with the gritty music roaring out of local clubs by hometown heroes like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. They took lessons from the bluesmen and even sat in with their bands. "They were so pleased that we wanted to learn," Goldberg recalls. "No one had given them that kind of attention before." *Born in Chicago*, a new documentary from John Anderson (who directed 2004's *Brian Wilson Presents: Smile*), tells the story of those kids – along with the artists across the Atlantic who were discovering the blues around the same time. "I came of age with the Beatles and Stones, and I had no idea where those songs came from," says Anderson. He corralled some seriously big names for the film (which is currently awaiting distribution): Bob Dylan praises Bloomfield as "the best guitar player I ever heard on any level," while Keith Richards talks about the "brass balls" the Stones had to tackle the standard "Little Red Rooster." Goldberg still remembers how Waters scowled at him the first few times he sat in with Waters' band. Finally, Goldberg says, "Something clicked, and I got it right. Muddy looked down and smiled at me. It was like my bar mitzvah." DAVID BROWNE

Bloomfield in Chicago

Waters interviewed by Bloomfield in the early Sixties

Dylan circa 1970

2014 Vintage Guitars – “Igniting the Blues” by Dan Forte approx. 25 pages.
This is a very informative story. Absolutely one of the better ones of all the articles on Bloomfield.