



1960s Blues Boom (page 4)



The 1960s Blues Boom By John Power

Free.

Another group of late starters, Free were formed in '68, but enjoyed a good pedigree, as old blues stalwart, Alexis Korner, gave them their name, at a time when they were all still teenagers: singer Paul Rodgers and drummer Simon Kirke were 18, lead guitarist, Paul Kossoff was 17, and bassist, Andy Frazer only 15. Within eight months they had recorded their first album, 'Tons of Sobs' on Island Records, in 1969 and were on their way to a successful career. The fact that this was two years after the beginning of psychedelia is testimony to the quality of their music, which put them above fashion fads. Kossoff and Kirke had already played in Black Cat Bones, an earlier blues outfit, and Rodgers had sung with Brown Sugar, but when Kossoff saw them he asked Rodgers if he would like to team up with him and Kirke. Alexis Korner recommended Andy Frazer as bass player. He had already played with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers at his tender age.

Their second album was simply called 'Free', but it was their third album 'Fire and Water' that contained the track 'All Right Now', which when released as a single reached no.2 in the U.K. singles charts and no.4 in the U.S. Billboard charts. The album itself then reached no.2 in the album charts, and 17 in the Billboard charts, as well as selling extremely well worldwide. However the fourth album, 'Highway' only reached no.41 in the U.K and 190 on Billboard.

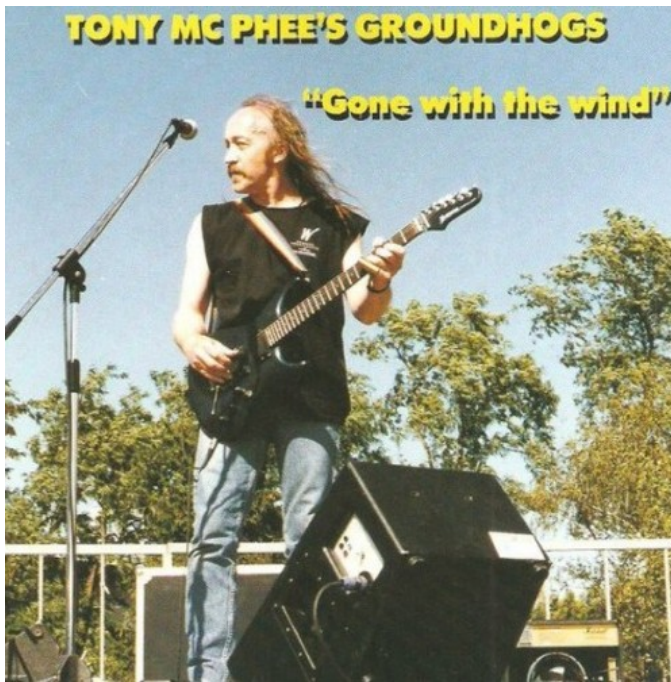
In '71 the hard drug problems of Paul Kossoff caused the band to split, but a live album, 'Free Live' was released to fill the gap until they reformed and tried to come to terms with Kossoff's unreliability, and recorded 'Free at Last' in '72. With Kossoff still often unable to play at or even turn up for gigs Frazer left later that year and was replaced by Tetsu Yamauchi, who had been in the Faces after Ronnie Lane left, and keyboardist John Bendrick also helped finish 'Free at Last'. Wendle Richardson from Osibisa replaced Kossoff on tour to promote the album in the U.S. in '73 before the group finally disbanded. Rodgers and Kirke went on to form the highly successful Bad Company with Led Zeppelin's manager and their record label for several albums. Frazer formed Sharks, and even Kossoff managed to function with Back Street in '73 before he died in '76, aged only 25. Andy Frazer died in 2015.

Rodgers and Kirke toured again as Bad Company from 2012 to 2016, and in 2017 Rodgers did a Free Spirit tour to celebrate the music of Free.



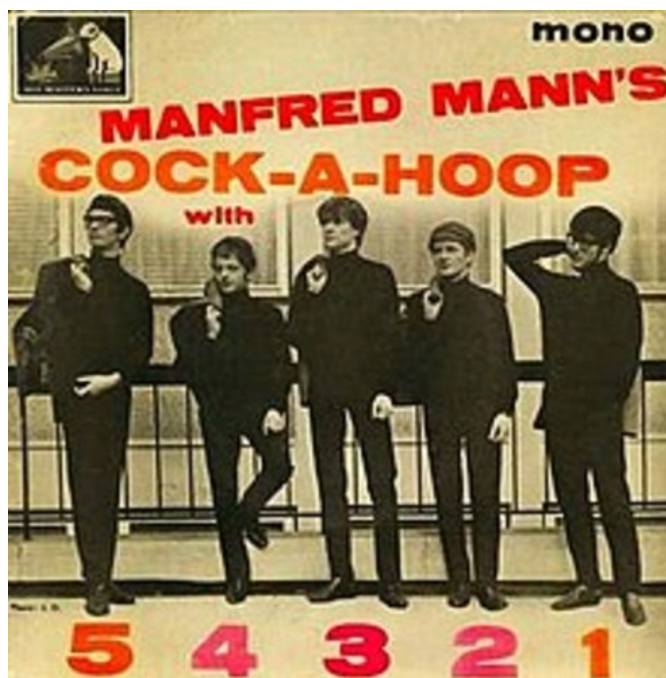
The Groundhogs

Formed in '63 in London, the Groundhogs deserve a longevity award, being still active in 2017, but that's having had 29 members during those years, with inevitable breakups and reforms, and have made 13 albums. They were at their height in the '70s, and backed the Stones on tour. Tony McPhee, the guitarist and singer has been the only constant member of all the line-ups.



Pop Success; Celtic and Northern Blues/Soul.

We have seen that many of those that rode in on the Blues Boom often achieved fair degrees of success commercially, although it became an era when the young record buying public could afford albums instead of scraping together pocket money for singles, and so it was a time when singles became less important. Yet there were several artists who achieved considerable commercial success and do need a mention for their musical contribution:



Manfred Mann.

Probably got their best form of promotion when their single 5.4.3.2.1 was chosen as the opening theme for trendy Mod music programme Ready Steady Go, that started the weekend on a Friday evening in the early sixties. There was certainly a blues element to their sound, and singer Paul Jones had learned harmonica in the same clubs and groups as Stones and Yardbirds. He maintained his enthusiasm for the blues after his pop success with a B.B.C. Radio 4 programme, up to 2018. And at least one of the other group members played afterwards in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, while Manfred went Prog with his Earth Band.

The Who.

Also benefitted from Mod fashion and are thought of as the ultimate Mod icons with their 'Swinging London' Union Jack and bullseye Pop Art motifs, despite earlier Mod favourites like Georgie Fame. In retrospect they referred to their early music as the High Numbers as Maximum R&B, even though there were elements of Surf music back then, long before rock operas diverted Pete Townsend's energies.



The kinks

first two singles when Dave Davies fronted the band, and early album tracks certainly fitted into hard thrusting r&b, but once brother Ray Davies took over writing about Village Greens and Waterloo Sunsets their whole sound became watered down.

Up in Newcastle we have already mentioned the Animals: the original five members famed for their soulful delivery of Ray Charles and other classic r&b numbers. And although Eric Burden went psychedelic in '67 and morphed his route into an American New Animals various line ups have kept the original sound going to 2018 [so far, as I write] with an array of talented musicians and even the original drummer still with them.

Joe Cocker and the Grease Band did the same for Northern Soul in Sheffield, providing useful musicians to feed into other bands, as well as Joe's gravelly ballads.

Its Manchester we have to thank for Victor Brox, as well as John Mayall. Victor's main band was **The Victor Brox Blues Train**, which he kept going alongside various projects including singing for Aynsley Dunbar's Retaliation and working with a host of other top line musicians.

In Ireland a sax player in a '50's style showband was the first inkling of how much the Celtic Bardic tradition would add to the spread of rhythm and blues when **Van Morrison** formed **Them**. Van's success is so overwhelming worldwide, with him having had most of his old blues and soul heroes guest with his band over the years that little needs to be said. **Taste** gave us **Rory Gallagher** too, a fine blues guitarist. **Eire Apparent**, another fine band. Later **Thin Lizzy**, steeped in the blues, moved into psychedelia in their own and often cross-cultural way like **Horslips**, in a country still broad of its own folk traditions.

In Scotland too, much talent emerged from the era. Not least of all **Lulu and the Luvvers**, before the wee soul shouter took to family entertainment, but also the **Frankie Miller Band**, **Nazareth**, the **Alex Harvey Soul Band** and **Stone the Crows**, a name given to the group by Led Zeppelin's manager, Peter Grant, when he heard Maggie Bell belt out her songs. Successful groups less easy to pigeon hole that certainly had blues roots, like **Ten Years After**, with Alvin Lee's high speed jazz crossover innovations being a good case in point. But also the **Moody Blues** at the time of their first album with Denny Lane on vocals were steeped in blues, before the Justin Hayward line -up transformed into a spacey kind of psychedelic prog rock were another. And many more who moved on into psychedelic influence we know. Even Pink Floyd began as a blues band!

At the other end of the scale, in a study which can barely hope to be exhaustive, many other regional and lesser known 'also rans' deserve a mention, Like Davy Jones and the King Bees, when Davy Jones was to become David Bowie, but also played sax in this blues band. Fellow glam rocker Marc Bolan had his roots too in a Mod band called John's Children. Blues by 5, Cops and Robbers, the Fays, the Chasers, the Eyes, the Exotics, the Emeralds, the Plebs, the Redcaps, Pauls Disciples, The Hipster Image, The Beazers, the Eyes of Blue, Nix Nomads, the Mark Leeman Five, Black Cat Bones, and Downliners Sect were all of



the era, although the Sect could not be wholly described as blues based. All of these and many more I'm sure deserve a mention.