

# JIMI HENDRIX

## A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

by Paul Brett



**I had been in bed about half an hour when the phone rang. Having finished a gig in the North East of England and travelled through the night to London, I thought \*\*\*\*\*!!!!!! "Hi**

**Paul, it's Chas here, Chas Chandler, I've got Jim Hendrix on tomorrow night and I'd really like to invite you and the band to see him ". Chas Chandler was the ex bass player in the Animals, who had branched out into Artiste Management. " Sure, OK Chas, I'll call you back later for details, I must get some sleep as we have another gig tonight "**

I was playing at the time with a chart band called Elmer Gantry's Velvet Opera who had a hit record with "Flames" and a number 1 LP as part of "The Rock Machine Turns you on" CBS compilation. I'd heard lots about Jimi from the grapevine, but we were working nearly every night and doing Radio 1 Club Live Sessions and John Peel plus lots of other recording sessions during the day, so we hadn't actually caught one of Jimi's club shows, even though we were playing some of the same venues. The gig at The Saville Theatre in London's

Shaftesbury Avenue, was a big one for Jimi and also on the bill was ex Moody Blues guitarist Denny Lane who later joined Paul McCartney's Wings, as did my session drummer Steve Holly in the 78-81 line up. The Saville was packed and Jimi was absolutely stunning. Totally original and totally mind-blowing. This was a true innovator in the electric guitar genre. The sound and technique were awesome as was his performance. Jimi

es I had witnessed to date. I had played electric guitar with quite a few bands by this time and established quite a niche for myself as a top session player, playing on a wide variety of records. Seeing Jimi play was an awesome experience and he inspired lots of guitarists to seek new highs on the instrument. His version of Bob Dylan's " All along the Watchtower" was inspirational. I met Jimi quite a few times after that and we jammed at a couple of the late night clubs as well. Jimi played bass ! It was the norm in those days for musicians to meet up after they had finished their shows and have a drink, unwind and jam in a relaxed atmosphere, The Cromwellian, Oxford Street Club, Speakeasy and a few other names of the past were the main haunts of many players after hours. I remember playing a slot machine next to Jimi and we were not winning. He said " You dance with the devil and he always calls the tune ".

What many people do not realise about Jimi Hendrix is that he was a true American patriot. He had served as a paratrooper from 1961 to 65, when he was discharged with an injury. Many of my American friends were called up to fight the dubious War in Vietnam and many did not return. Jimi did his bit by supporting the cause and you will see that many of his songs feature in the countless war movies about Vietnam.

Chas Chandler first met Hendrix in 1966 in the States and Chas persuaded him to let him be his manager. He brought him to London and married him up with Noel and Mitch and The Jimi Hendrix Experience was born. Their first



Jimi's Mum and Dad



Rare family photographs



wasn't possessed with a great rock voice , more a bluesy low key delivery, but the whole combination was unique. Backed up by Noel Redding (Bass) and Mitch Mitchell (Drums), Jim put on one of the best live performanc-

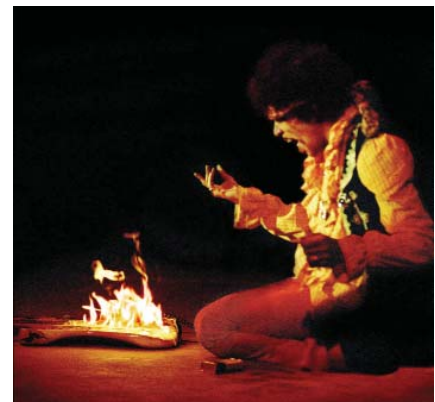
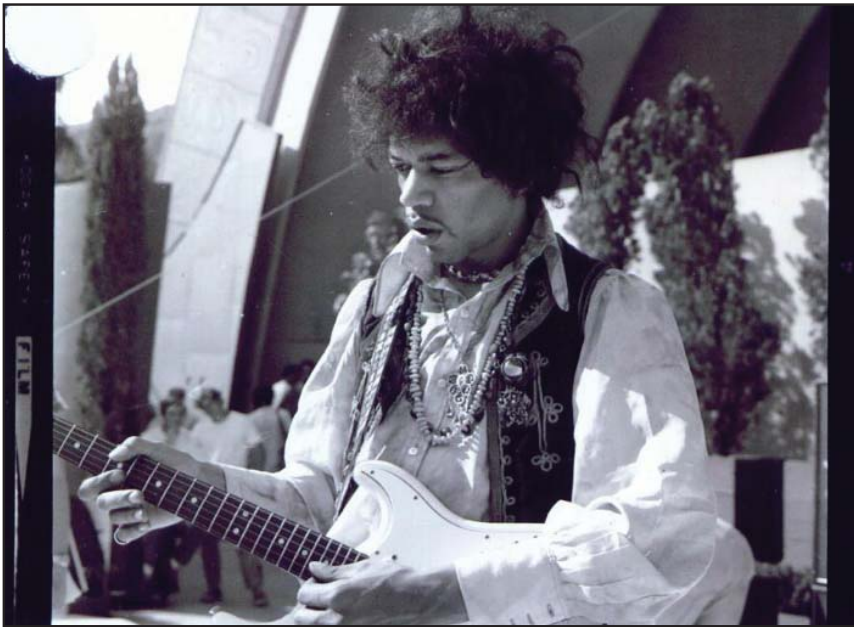


Fig. 1- Monterey International Pop Festival in 1967



single release " Hey Joe" literally stormed the rock market in the UK along with later classics such as "Purple Rain" and "The Wind Cries Mary". His first LP "Are you Experienced ? " was and still is a monument in time for rock music. The guitar skills on display were unique to Hendrix alone and his appearance on the Monterey International Pop Festival in 1967 was awesome. The Who were about the most spectacular live band at the time and they played an amazing set. But Hendrix stole the show which climaxed with him setting his guitar on fire( see Fig. 1). He went one step further than Pete Townsend who smashed up his guitar on stage. It was all new to rock and roll stagecraft at the time and Hendrix was on a different plateau to anyone else. In total, the Jimi Hendrix Experience made and released three LP's before the band split. Hendrix moved on with a new line up and created even more history when he played a truly amazing set at the now historical festival - Woodstock. This Festival in itself showcased all that was best at the time throughout the world of rock and acoustic music. Ritchie Havens played a great set of driving acoustic guitar and vocals, backed up by a percussive rhythm section. Hendrix stopped the show with his solo rendition of " The Star Spangled Banner". An interpretation of the American National Anthem like the Yanks had never heard before. Screaming, overdriven guitar which soared above the thousands of festival hippies and cemented Jim's reputation as a "Godlike" figure to the world. Ironically, Jimi's star started to wane as the unpopularity of the Vietnam War began to wane with the American Public. By the time he played the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970 the new breed of fans were nowhere near as enthusiastic as those from the earlier mid 60's period. Yes, it is indeed very few artistes and bands that survive

that long in Rock and Roll. That's why it's such a great testament to the Rolling Stones in particular, to have stayed together more or less as a unit over the course of 40 odd years and still remain at the top of the world tree as far as tours and popularity goes. Many of the iconic figures in Rock music tend to be iconic because they suffer from self induced or drug induced rigor mortis. Now it's still being argued as to whether the death of Jimi Hendrix in September 1970 was in fact accidental brought about by a cocktail of drugs which led him to choke on his own vomit whilst being taken by ambulance to hospital or something more sinister. There have and still are many theories still going around about this, much the same as Presley's death. Police and medical staff claimed that Hendrix had been dead for some time before they arrived. His girlfriend, who committed suicide later, said the ambulance arrived and took Jimi to hospital and he was alive when they took him. Eric Burdon, singer of the Animals was supposed to have written a lyric claiming that Hendrix had committed suicide etc. etc. etc. Consider this as a reasonable theory. Ambulance drivers in that part of London were picking up lots of drug related cases every day and through the night. The Police were also busy

dealing with the same problems. Was it nearer the truth, that at the end of a long day, the Ambulance crew failed to put Jimi in the correct position in the back of the ambulance to avoid him swallowing his own sick ? Did they even know it was Jimi Hendrix ? Should that have made a difference to how he was treated anyway ? Were both the Police and Ambulance service embarrassed to release a simple truth, choosing to replace it with a different version of events ? and finally, was one of the ambulance crew being honest when he was relating the story to friends in a pub a few weeks later ? The story goes he was devastated as he was one of Hendrix's fans and after a long tiring day of picking up many such cases, they didn't recognise Jimi and just forgot or were too tired to carry out the basis procedures required to stop a patient choking on their own vomit ? Who knows.

Wherever lies the truth, Hendrix was a one off, like Robert Johnson in the 1930's and Elvis Presley in the 50's and 60's. They changed the world of Rock and Blues as we knew it and injected a whole new concept for others to follow, change and progress. All three of these icons died in strange circumstances that really had nothing to do with what they achieved during their lives. Jimi Hendrix will go down in history as one of the greatest rock musicians ever. Very few Investment Bankers or Politicians will be remembered in such a way or in any way for that matter. There is the short term rip off people's lives, hopes and dreams, for which they reward themselves with lorry loads of cash. Hendrix apparently died leaving virtually nothing in his account. But he lived and brought pleasure to millions. I hope you're not dancing with the devil James but if you are, I bet "ole red eyes" finds it hard to not to give you a standing ovation !

