

1967 - Year of Psychedelia

MARK PRENDERGAST DESCRIBES PSYCHEDELIC 1967:
THE YEAR THAT CHANGED THE HISTORY OF MUSIC

As surrealism is to art, so psychedelia is to music, especially the pop and rock of the 1960s, during the era of evolutionary change. One can argue without apology that psychedelia was one of the most important forces for social and artistic change in the late 20th Century. Psychedelia was much more than a style – rather it was a culmination and combination of numerous different forces which exploded in the 1960s.

With antecedents in literature, art, theatre and performance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, psychedelia only really took off when Aldous Huxley coined the term in the 1950s, to describe the effects of mind-expanding drugs like mescaline, psilocybin and LSD-25. LSD (aka acid), blew psychedelia wide open in the 1960s and was totally responsible for the technicolour revolution which ensued.

If TV programmes like *The Avengers* and *The Prisoner* owed much to the effects of LSD, and street fashion, interior design, art and film all had swirling hallucinogenic colours, psychedelia was best expressed through popular music. It changed peoples' approach to writing, recording and performance. As well as influencing dazzling album covers, psychedelia became the *lingua franca* of a vast social revolution, a youth culture which straddled the globe. Anybody interested in deeper history should consult the following books: *The Jefferson Airplane & The San Francisco Sound* (Ralph J. Gleason, 1969), *Storming Heaven – LSD & The American Dream* (Jay Stevens, 1988) and *Food Of The Gods* (Terence McKenna, 1992).

What is surprising about psychedelic music is that it had such a profound effect. Given the limitations of studios, instruments and recording equipment, it presided over one of most creative eras in recorded sound, especially in Britain and the USA. Initially it was seen as a single release gimmick – but boy what singles. 1966 included The Byrds *Eight Miles High*, The Stones *Paint It Black*, The Kinks *Sunny Afternoon*, The Electric

Prunes *I Had Too Much To Dream (Last Night)*, Donovan *Season of the Witch*, The 13th Floor Elevators *You're Gonna Miss Me*, The Yardbirds *Happenings Ten Years Time Ago* and (icing on the cake) The Beach Boys *Good Vibrations*.

The Kinks mantra-like *See My Friends* had presaged psychedelia as early as 1965, but the singles released in 1967 would be the best of many a career. The Kinks *Waterloo Sunset* evokes London's Summer Of Love as well as any. The Beatles gave us *Straawberry Fields* and *I Am The Walrus*, Traffic's *Paper Sun* and *Hole In My Shoe*, Pink Floyd's *Arnold Layne* and *See Emily Play*, and Procol Harum's *Whiter Shade of Pale*.

Yet in a year which included Human Be-Ins in San Francisco, Oz, the 14 Hour Technicolour Dream, Pink Floyd going quadraphonic live, Hendrix at Monterey Pop, the Jagger/Richards/Jones drug busts, and the sad end of Syd Barret's performing career, when Pink Floyd's founder literally burned out in public. And the LP record album finally came into its own as an art form, so let's celebrate the year that was psychedelia with the essential platters in the very order in which they were released.

1: January 1967

The Doors – The Doors (Elektra)

Recorded in only six days at Sunset Sound Studios in Hollywood, California, *The Doors* is not only one of the best debut albums ever recorded, it also uniquely melds dread, Grand Guignol theatrics and silvery psychedelia into a unique package that still thrills. Morrison opted to drop acid and perform high, and this is obvious on both *The Crystal Ship* and *End Of The Night*. The album's defining song, the lengthy *Light My Fire* (a smash hit US No1 single), featured Ray Manzarek playing a duet of Vox Continental Organ and Fender Rhodes Piano Bass. The hypnotic quality of that, combined with Robby Krieger's spidery Gibson SG playing, made a psychedelic



classic. But it was cut to bits for single release, so it's only here you will hear it in all its glory! Of course the 11-minute plus final track *The End* would define the band in all its gothic dread (and also define Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*). Watch out for different versions on the mono and stereo originals, while those heard on *Apocalypse Now* and Oliver Stone's 1991 film *The Doors* are different again.

2. February 1967

Younger Than Yesterday – The Byrds (Columbia)

Recorded in 1965/66, *Eight Miles High* was The Byrds psychedelic calling card and one of the last things Gene Clark wrote as a member of the group. But in many ways the subsequent *Fifth Dimension* album failed to live up to expectations. With Clark gone (ironically due to a fear of flying), The Byrds faced an uncertain 1967, but *Younger Than Yesterday*, recorded in just 11 days, became the band's most psychedelic opus up til then. Fuelled by new producer Gary Usher's studio experimentalism, the album was awash with sitar-sounding guitars, backwards guitars and all manner of effects. More importantly Chris Hillman emerged as a fully-fledged songwriter with four songs the highlight been the acid drenched *Thoughts And*