

MITCH MITCHELL TRIBUTE

Jan Person/Redferns



Mitch Mitchell

(b 09.07.1947; d 13.11.2008)

Mitch Mitchell, who died recently, was the brilliant English drummer and unlikely musical soulmate of the great Jimi Hendrix. Forty years later, Geoff Nicholls remembers the man who remains the all-time favourite of thousands of rock drummers worldwide

In 1967, three of the greatest rock albums ever made were released: The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's* and the Jimi Hendrix Experience's *Are You Experienced* and *Axis: Bold As Love*. Even at the creative peak of the lightning-speed '60s, these albums captured an unrivalled newness and inventiveness. With Hendrix, the sheer joy of playing is what he's all about and the explosively innovative genius found an able and willing foil in the most unlikely of figures - a puny, white 20-year-old English session drummer.

Like all great artistic pairings, this couldn't have been planned. Former Animals bass player Chas Chandler rescued Hendrix from obscurity in New York, flying him over to London on a wing and a prayer. Neither Chas nor Jimi had a clear idea of what direction the guitarist's career might take. Had they not discovered Mitch at a particularly ripe stage of his precocious development, Hendrix's music may have developed in a very different fashion.

Some time during those first rehearsals, it became apparent to Hendrix that here was a musical partner who could not only keep up, he had the lightning reflexes, the imagination and the sheer balls to prod and motivate him to even greater heights of sonic exploration.

Gaining experience

Mitch was still only 19 when he met Hendrix, but was already a seasoned pro with broad musical experience and a burgeoning interest in jazz. He'd been to stage school and had success acting on TV,

but music took over and by age 13 he was drumming with Pete Nelson and The Travellers. Working Saturdays at the Hanwell shop of Jim Marshall (yes, the amp innovator), he picked up gigs with local stars including Screaming Lord Sutch. He graduated to demo sessions in London's thriving Tin Pan Alley. Top session ace Bobby Graham passed on some of his work to Mitch who found himself playing alongside other proto-rock stars John-Paul Jones and Jimmy Page. Meanwhile he was making a name with the Riot Squad. He even appeared on TV's 'Ready, Steady, Go!' rocking the Les Reed Orchestra.

Mitch picked up tips from the earlier generation of swing stars, including Eric Delaney, Jock Cummings and the extraordinary Phil Seamen. At 18 he joined Georgie Fame's Blue Flames, one of the coolest acts around. This completed his musical apprenticeship, the older, jazz-soaked Blue Flames turning him on to Monk, Mingus and Coltrane, not to mention Max Roach, Elvin and Philly Joe Jones and Tony Williams. "I already loved Earl Palmer, Benny Benjamin and Al Jackson," Mitch later recalled in his autobiography with John Platt, *The Hendrix Experience*.

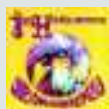
Every band photo of Mitch up to this point has him out front (even with Fame), a cherub-faced pixie sporting a Cheshire cat grin. There are parallels with Keith Moon, but while Keith simply looks naughty, Mitch already has a knowing self-confidence. This cockiness took a brief knock when after 18 months he was sacked - along with the entire band - by Fame's management.

A shell-shocked Mitch had only one day to ruminate before getting the call that would mark his destiny. He joined Hendrix in autumn 1966 and by

"His more florid ideas coincided uncannily with Hendrix's riffs and moods. Anything Hendrix came up with, Mitch's musical and fearless mind would match"

Must-Own Mitch

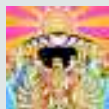
Jimi Hendrix Experience *Are You Experienced* (1967)



The greatest debut rock album ever, and that's official. Every track is an absolute gem. Drumming of the utmost inventiveness - fearless, bold, imaginative and witty.

★★★★★

Jimi Hendrix *Axis: Bold As Love* (1967)

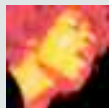


Just months later, the band delivered a second, equally important masterpiece. Mitch didn't disappoint his legions of new drumming fans.

Unforgettable fills, great grooves and even expert brushwork.

★★★★★

Jimi Hendrix *Electric Ladyland* (1968)



Hendrix's sprawling, flawed, kaleidoscopic masterpiece. Under increasing pressure, Mitch remains steadfast, contributing magnificently on classics such as 'Voodoo Child', 'Crosstown Traffic' and 'All Along The Watchtower'.

★★★★★

December was back on 'Ready, Steady, Go!' going wild on 'Hey Joe' before a stunned nation.

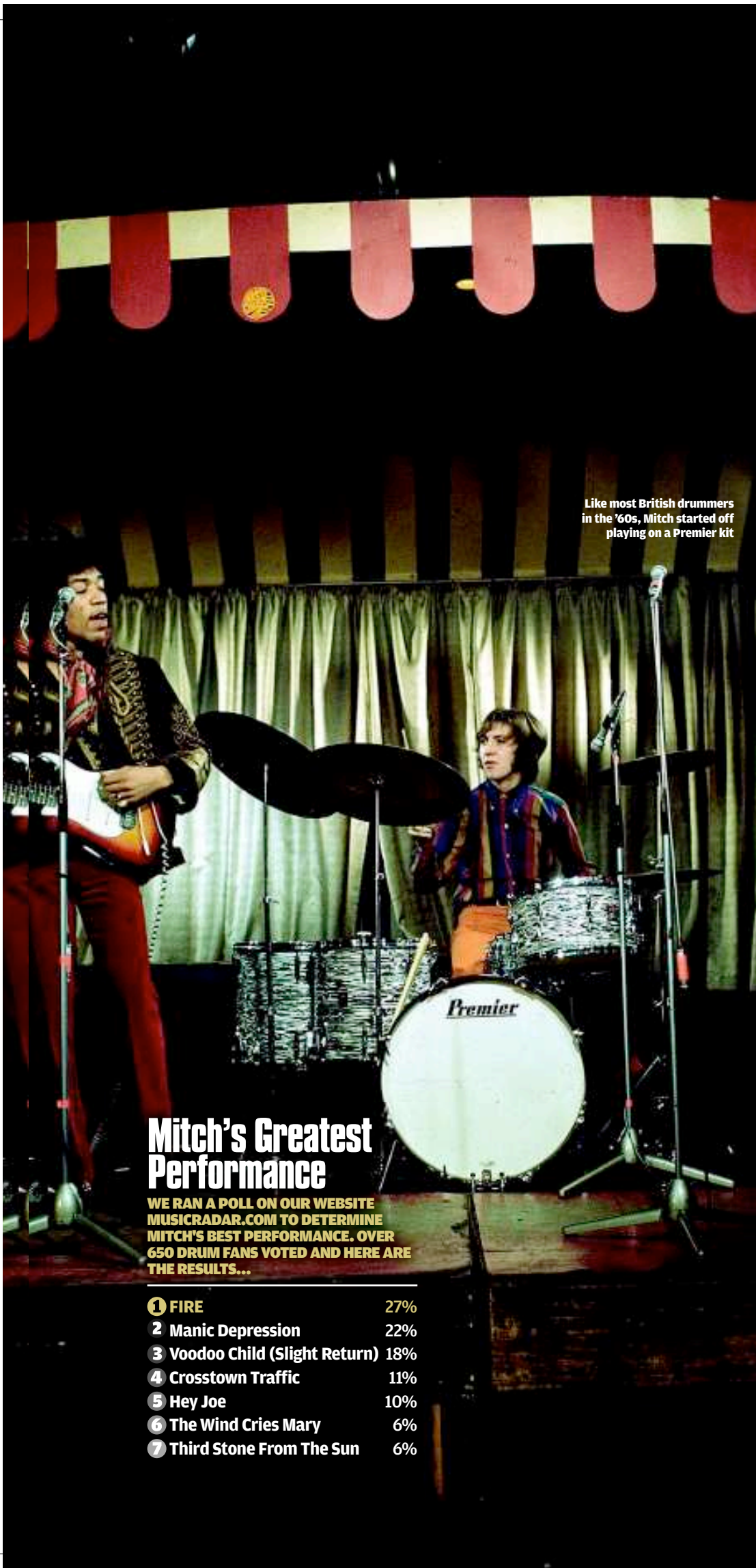
Florid ideas

There's no doubt Mitch wouldn't have played the way he did had he not already absorbed the examples of Keith Moon and of the power trio of organist Graham Bond, featuring Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce. Fresh out of the Blue Flames and already a session veteran, Mitch was wholly capable of playing tasteful, in-the-groove blues and soul. The best example is on the slow blues 'Red House' (from *Are You Experienced*), where Mitch's restrained performance is both tasty and classy. Had he played everything like this however, we would now be mourning Mitch as a minor footnote in musical history.

Luckily, he played most everything else like a man possessed. In fact, he was a man possessed. The spirit of improvisation had taken hold with Britain's rockers and Mitch found himself in a potentially comparable situation to Baker and Moon. The difference was that Hendrix's concept as a guitar player was way ahead of Clapton's blues or Townshend's power pop. His imagination and technical facility were much further left field. Mitch was encouraged to trade ideas with the greatest rock instrumentalist visionary ever. It was sink or swim. ▶

Ray Stevenson/Rex Features





Like most British drummers in the '60s, Mitch started off playing on a Premier kit

Mitch's Greatest Performance

WE RAN A POLL ON OUR WEBSITE MUSICRADAR.COM TO DETERMINE MITCH'S BEST PERFORMANCE. OVER 650 DRUM FANS VOTED AND HERE ARE THE RESULTS...

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | FIRE | 27% |
| 2 | Manic Depression | 22% |
| 3 | Voodoo Child (Slight Return) | 18% |
| 4 | Crosstown Traffic | 11% |
| 5 | Hey Joe | 10% |
| 6 | The Wind Cries Mary | 6% |
| 7 | Third Stone From The Sun | 6% |

Mitch Remembered

TRIBUTES FROM THE DRUMMING COMMUNITY

» GARY HUSBAND INDEPENDENT

Mitch Mitchell was of monumental influence and inspiration to me and I've been profoundly shocked and saddened to hear of his passing. Mitch had such character, personality and a really infectious and electrifying exuberance in the way he played. He was also a true gentleman.

» CARL PALMER INDEPENDENT

I first met Mitch in 1964. I was recording at Regent Sounds in Denmark St with my group The King Bees, when in he walked. He said, "Where do I set up my drums?" Yes, Mitch was doing the session, not me. Also a lead guitar player turned up at the same time to play on that track, 'A Little Bit Of Soap'. So that meant I wasn't playing that day and the guitarist had been dumped as well - good old Larry Page at Fontana Records! I played the pieces of music with the band for Mitch so he could learn it, and he said, "Why did they call me over to play?" "No idea," I said.

We never spoke after that day because our paths never crossed again. We came close in New York when I was with The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown and he was in the Experience. Also Mitch was the first drummer in ELP - yes that's right, audition only! That gig I beat him to, thank God! But he'll be forever remembered by drummers because he was original and a great all round player. You could only see half of what he could do with Jimi Hendrix. I saw him play in the studio on that day in 1964 - unbelievable!

» BILLY COBHAM INDEPENDENT

With Mitch gone, there's a void that can't be filled. He's in a better place though.

» NICKO MCBRAIN IRON MAIDEN

Mitch was one of a kind. His drumming was - and still is - an inspiration to drummers of all ages. He was flamboyant, but very precise with amazing speed of hand and a wonderful feel. His drumming on 'Manic Depression' was stunning and tracks such as 'Little Wing' and 'Wind Cries Mary' are testament to his skill. On the occasions we were together, he was always a gentleman and fun to be with. Mitch, you will be sorely missed. Much love and respect.

» DAVE MATTACKS INDEPENDENT

Getting to see and hear Mitch pre-Hendrix, it was readily apparent that he was one of a handful of players emerging at that time who injected some jazz sensibility, swing and non-gratuitous chops into the rock scene. He really opened up the vocabulary for a lot of us youngsters.

» CHARLIE BENANTE ANTHRAX

Mitch was a true original. When you hear songs such as 'Fire' and 'Manic Depression', you can't help but be drawn in by the drumming. When I was a little kid I'd always pick up on Mitch's drumming - his style was all his own. His drumming will live on forever, a true original and part of the Experience.

» BOBBY ELLIOTT THE HOLLIES

I first saw Mitch playing with a band called The Riot Squad. At the time, his technique reminded me of the great Kenny Clare. In early 1967, when I was stuck in a Hamburg hospital for two weeks with peritonitis, Mitch played on a couple of Hollies tracks on our *Evolution* album at Abbey Road. Graham Nash later told me that Mitch had asked if he should play the drum part as I would - in my style. That impressed me. He did a great job.

» JASON BITTNER SHADOWS FALL

As I opened my local paper last week, I was shocked to read about the passing of one of my teenage drum heroes. I started listening to the Jimi Hendrix

► Experience in the early '80s thanks to my mum's record collection and I was immediately drawn to Mitch's style. He had the reckless abandon of Keith Moon, combined with the jazz background of Ginger Baker, who were the other two drummers I was emulating at that time. Although I was never lucky enough to see Jimi, I was fortunate enough to see Mitch play live on one of the first stops of the Experience Hendrix tour. Too bad this would be his last. He was a great drummer and he'll be missed.

► **STEVE BARNEY** INDEPENDENT

Mitch had a truly original style of drumming that was free of any constrictions or obvious pattern and grooves. The way he interplayed with Hendrix and Redding's melodic hooks was genius. If someone played that on a song today, people might call it over-playing, but you can't imagine the Experience without Mitch's shambolic freedom and expressive style. That's not to say Mitch couldn't hold down a rocking power groove – check out the heavy, heavy groove of 'Little Miss Lover' on the *Axis: Bold As Love* album. The Experience will largely be remembered for the rocking tunes, but for me, I loved the other side of Mitch's playing on the delicate songs like 'Little Wing', 'Up From The Skies' and 'Castles Made Of Sand'. A true pioneer of drumming has sadly left us. Mitch Mitchell: often imitated, never duplicated!

► **KARL BRAZIL** JAMES BLUNT

Mitch Mitchell was a very exciting inspiring drummer to all drummers all over the world. I once tried to read and copy his parts for 'Crosstown Traffic' and attempting this showed me how musical he really was. He'll be remembered for his unique style forever.

► **MIKE TERRANA** MASTERPLAN

I was saddened to hear about the passing of Mitch Mitchell. I grew up on the music of the Jimi Hendrix Experience and they had an amazing sound for a three-piece power trio. Mitch Mitchell's drumming was a very important part of the Hendrix sound. The early '60s were an interesting time for music and drumming because you could hear the evolution as jazz and blues musicians crossed over to play hard rock music. Mitch Mitchell was one of those drummers, on the cutting edge of that stylistic transition and I truly believe his approach to playing rock music created a template for future rock drummers. The music of Hendrix was definitely ahead of its time and Mitch Mitchell was in the driver's seat. He was perfect for this situation – his fills, grooves, tuning and feel will live on in the hearts and minds of drummers for many generations to come. One of the most influential and creative forces in drumming has left behind a great legacy of information, which we can use as a constant source of inspiration.

► **DEAN BUTTERWORTH** GOOD CHARLOTTE

Mitch Mitchell's drumming on *Are You Experienced* changed my life. His hybrid of jazz and rock put him in a league of his own. As far as I'm concerned, Mitch Mitchell is one of the most innovative drummers of all time. He'll be missed.

► **XAVIER MURIEL** BUCKCHERRY

Mitchell paved the way for drummers in power trio outfits. He had a fantastic way of playing for the song and not for his own ego. Perfectly placed fills and knowing when and where to lay back or push the feel created his signature sound. He's undoubtedly one of the greatest drummers to have blessed us with his work and it still stands up today.

► **CHAD SMITH** RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

The impact of Mitch Mitchell's work with Jimi Hendrix in three short years will probably never be duplicated. RIP Mitch.

► **STEVE SMITH** VITAL INFORMATION

Before I heard Mitch Mitchell's drumming I didn't relate to rock drumming. I grew up on the big band ►



Rob Shanahan/Getty Images

While Ginger generally kept his playing simple and majestically solid, Mitch went completely overboard. Mitch later regretted some of the overplaying, but Hendrix was sufficiently smitten with the drummer's bravura to let him off the leash at every opportunity. It must have been a novel experience for Jimi too, following the strictly-rehearsed American soul circuit.

The musical relationship between Hendrix and Mitchell has been likened to a rock equivalent of that between John Coltrane and Elvin Jones. What made

Depression', that rarest of beasts, an out-and-out rocker in 3/4 time. Mitch took inspiration from Ronnie Stephenson on Johnny Dankworth's 1961 hit 'African Waltz'. The spiralling triplet feel (which prompted observers to make the Elvin analogy) is ideal for Mitch and he really excels, sparring with Jimi throughout. In fact, he almost overwhelms the guitarist, who graciously allows him to have his head. Towards the end, from around 2:30, the stoked up drummer lets fly with a non-stop flurry of fills,

“Hendrix was sufficiently smitten with Mitch's bravura to let him off the leash at every opportunity. It must have been a novel experience for Jimi too”

Mitch's contribution so right wasn't just the driving force of his Tamlas or Purdie inflected grooves, it was the thrilling inventiveness of his fills. His more florid ideas coincided uncannily with Hendrix's riffs and moods. Anything Hendrix came up with, Mitch's musical and fearless mind would find a perfect match. Hendrix increasingly left spaces expressly for Mitch to fill and Mitch conjured up hooks that are as memorable today as when they first appeared.

Are you experienced?

The trio's debut album contains the two tracks drummers talk about most. First is 'Manic

exhibiting a superb swing feel and stunning confidence of execution.

The other celebrated track is 'Fire', a furious rocker, during which Mitch answers Jimi's guitar riffs with equally memorable phrases of his own. The bass drum sound is fat and punchy. The engineering of Eddie Kramer and others, including Gary Kellegran, was a major contributing factor to the Mitch legend, which Mitch himself acknowledged. Every nuance of the drumming is heard cleanly on the Experience's early works.

The trio's second album, *Axis: Bold As Love*, carries on in the same vein, albeit with a slightly



Even in 2008, Mitch still denied any suggestion that he was a rock'n'roll drummer

fatter production sound. Mitch excels with inventive, melodic fills on 'Little Wing' and 'Wait Until Tomorrow'. No-one did anything like it in rock before Mitch and few have done anything as attractive since.

On 'If 6 Was 9', Mitch's accelerating breaks reach free-form, something you just don't expect in rock. Mitch is sometimes described as 'soloing'. He's not; he's playing within the music, but that music has transformed from melodic rock into explorations of electronic soundscapes, howls, shrieks and studio effects. While you'd never accuse the music of being anything other than rock, the Experience often functioned like a jazz trio. Live, Redding anchored while Hendrix went off on dazzling flights of fancy, Mitchell all the while biting at his heels. Various bootlegs ('Fire' is particularly stunning - tinyurl.com/6kylsf) reveal the way the band took huge risks, improvising boldly every night. When Hendrix

momentarily ran out of steam Mitch would be called on to solo. Not your pre-arranged rock solo, but genuine seat-of-the-pants jazz improv.

This may explain partly why Mitch's post-Hendrix career proved difficult and ultimately disappointing. While the heirs to Moon, Ginger and Bonham are every rock drummer today, the heirs to Mitch's brilliance are more the giants of jazz-rock. Tony Williams and Billy Cobham quickly dominated this territory with a whole new level of drumming. Then-youngsters including Steve Smith and Vinnie Colaiuta could relate to this merging of rock power with jazz facility. Mitch persevered with Larry Coryell and Jack Bruce, but was sadly left behind. It's as if the experience of Hendrix was too much to follow. Yet to have made such a glorious impact in such a ludicrously brief period - three truly great albums in two years - Mitch will always be remembered. **R**

Mitch's Kit

DRUMS

Like most British '60s drummers, Mitch started out on Premier. His early TV appearances show an oyster finish kit with 20" or 22"x14" kick, 14"x8" and two 16"x16" floor toms. The snare is either a Premier 2000 or a Ludwig Supra-Phonic 400. On

touring the USA in mid 1967 Mitch got a silver sparkle Ludwig. Responding to the escalation in both popularity and late-'60s volume, Mitch graduated to a double black Ludwig and then a similar black Gretsch. He had a selection of drums. Pictures show double 24"x14" kicks, but one pic seems to have a 20" Gretsch bass drum on the right. Toms used include mixtures of 12"x8" and 13"x9" mounted, with 14"x14" and 16"x16" or twinned 16" floors, maybe

even an 18"x16", plus invariably a 14"x5" Supra-Phonic snare.

CYMBALS

With Jimi, Mitch used Avedis Zildjians, again varying his set-up from gig to gig and over time. There's often a smallish, maybe 18", ride with a 20" or 22" riveted ride/crash high to his right. Hi-hats were 14" or 15", sometimes with a ching-ring mounted above. To his left, he'd have 16" or larger crashes.

▶ sounds of Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich. When I heard Mitch playing with Hendrix, I could finally relate to the rock music of my generation - mainly because the drumming sounded like a rocked out version of Buddy Rich meets Elvin Jones meets Tony Williams! The records he made with Jimi Hendrix still sound amazing to me. Mitch and Jimi were a symbiotic pair, similar to Elvin and Coltrane or Cobham and McLaughlin. They found each other at just the right time and place and created music that continues to influence generation after generation. Mitch was a very nice guy too - we hung out for a few days in 1985 when we were both recording at The Plant in Sausalito. In fact, he borrowed one of my snare drums for a recording he was making with Randy Hansen. Mitch Mitchell's recordings will live on and be an example of how to play music with a relaxed swaggering groove, creativity, interaction and energy.

» CARMINE APPICE INDEPENDENT

I happened to be in the UK when I found out about Mitch. It's great to see the respect TV news and newspapers are giving him. He deserves it. Mitch was a friend to me. I just saw him twice on the Experience Hendrix tour in the US. He's always been a really nice person ever since we met in the '60s and we hung out, drank and toured together in 1968 with Hendrix and Vanilla Fudge. I had some drum amps (as there were no PA systems that were any good at that time) and Mitch asked if he could use them. Of course he could. We both played Ludwig drums. I had Ludwig's first maple kit, Mitch had the second. I loved his playing and he said he appreciated mine. I thought he had a great flow to his playing and his jazz influence shone through. Even though he was self taught he had great hands and co-ordination. Even as late as 1 November when I saw him on the US tour he said he wasn't a rock drummer, he was a jazz drummer. If you listen to any Hendrix album... he certainly fooled us all! May he rest in peace only to rock again in rock 'n' roll heaven with Jimi and Noel, the original Hendrix Experience. We'll miss him.

» IAN PAICE DEEP PURPLE

In the same way that The Beatles lifted modern music to another level, Mitch was one of a select few players who helped re-establish the drums as a solo virtuoso instrument, with more complex and imaginative musical drum parts. He made the drummer much more than a simple timekeeping machine, as they had been in earlier rock'n'roll years.

» WILL CALHOUN LIVING COLOUR

In the past five years, I've had two great opportunities to tour with the Hendrix Experience project with Living Colour. I had a few great conversations with Mitch about his drumming technique, his Gretsch kits and performing at Woodstock. Buddy Miles and Mitch gave me another insight into the music and life of Jimi Hendrix from the drummer's chair. I first heard Mitch's drumming on the first Jimi Hendrix Experience album. It was a fresh approach to rock'n'roll. His drum fills, tuning, and brush technique put him in a different class to most rock drummers at that time. Being a huge Elvin Jones fan myself, I heard the huge impact Elvin had on Mitch. Mitch was a huge fan of jazz, we talked about many of the jazz greats during my backstage conversations on those tours. It was great to see him play drums with Billy Cox and the tribute musicians. Mitch will be missed.

» PETE THOMAS ELVIS COSTELLO

"When I was 15, back in 1970, I hitch-hiked to Mitch Mitchell's house in Sussex and just stood at the gate gawping. It was a beautiful Georgian house painted lilac, covered in pink flowers. To me, it seemed a natural extension of the *Axis: Bold As Love* cover. After a while his roadie NuNu came down the drive and asked me if I'd like to see Mitch's drums, this was thrilling. He took me through the gardens to the studio and there inside in a sunken drum area were the sacred kits: the double black Gretsch with the Rogers fittings, the black Ludwig with the 24" ▶



Upon joining the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Mitch switched styles from mod to hippie almost overnight



ivan keeman/Redferns

MITCH MITCHELL: SUCH A FRIENDLY LITTLE GNOME

Mitch Mitchell was already a rising star when he joined The Jimi Hendrix Experience. *Rhythm's* Chris Welch recalls the loveable rogue under the afro

Amongst a bunch of hardened jazzmen, Mitch Mitchell stood out as a cheeky young mod. He wore the same striped Ivy League jackets as the rest of the guys in Georgie Fame And The Blue Flames, but he was younger, better looking and full of enthusiasm. It was a miracle that he stood his ground among the grumpy older musicians, who muttered darkly about his time keeping - "Mitch is lovely, but he speeds up!" However, the boss was adamant. Fame liked his new drummer and he was staying, at least until the management suddenly sacked the entire band overnight.

Quite why The Blue Flames, then one of the most popular rhythm'n'blues bands in the UK, had been fired was a matter of speculation. But it certainly wasn't Mitch's fault. He was a breath of fresh air on a jaded scene.

He'd been with lively beat group The Riot Squad, who'd released some hot singles on the Pye label. Producer Denny Cordell recommended him to George Fame and so, in 1966, Johnny Mitchell, who'd been taught to play by Jim Marshall of

Marshall amps fame, became a fully-fledged Blue Flame, replacing the formidable Bill Eyden.

As a *Melody Maker* scribe, I often saw Mitch in action in clubs and recording studios. At our first meeting, his personality made him seem larger than life. A tiny chap with a big smile and boyish charm, he made everyone feel welcome, although he also had a musician's natural wariness.

Mitch in his Blue Flame days was polite, respectful and full of confidence behind a set of drums. My former *MM* colleague Richard Williams (now with *The Guardian*) remembers seeing him playing in his home town Nottingham. "Mitch was always my favourite drummer," he says. "I thought he was great with the Blue Flames and really drove the band. When he joined Jimi Hendrix... well, I don't think their records would have sounded nearly as good without him on board."

In my first *MM* interview with him in the summer of 1967, I wrote: 'Mitch is the tiny, energetic mod who's usually completely hidden behind the drums, which drive and kick behind Georgie and the other Flames. Although he looks about 16, John 'Mitch' Mitchell is in fact a very experienced 20-year-old drummer with a great deal of session work behind him. He's worked with Larry Page and Les Reed, played on all the Ivy League records and was with the Riot Squad before he joined the Flames. He listens to Elvin Jones, Tony Williams and Buddy Rich.

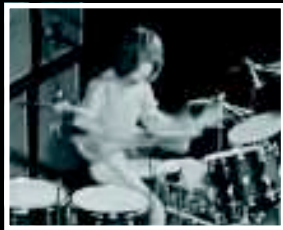
He also digs Brian Bennett and Bobby Elliott. He dislikes older musicians who sneer at "rock and rollers". Says Mitch: "It's so distasteful. And if I wasn't a damned sight better than they were at this age, I'd give up. They have so little to offer. They don't seem to know what it's all about."

Summing up Mitch the mod, I revealed that, like his mate Steve Marriott, Mitch was a sharp dresser who spent all his money on clothes. 'He shops mostly at Hung On You. He's guilty of having a short temper that he tries to contain. He's also very ambitious and digs showbusiness.'

When Mitch landed his gig with the Jimi Hendrix Experience in October 1966, it was a mind-blowing trip. Overnight, he became a hippie with a frizzed-out afro hairstyle and the Ivy League jacket was displaced by a flowery kaftan. More importantly, his drumming exploded with all the freedom the power rock guitar trio gave him. Never has a drummer responded to being unchained with quite such spectacular results. Mitch played with Jimi at one of his first London appearances, at Blaises Club. While Jimi grappled with his guitar, I was intrigued by the drummer who unleashed such volcanic fury in the cramped disco. I later saw Mitch with Jimi at the Saville Theatre, when the roadies shoved a vocal mic on a boom stand inside the bass drum, to boost his sound. When I spoke to Jimi later, he was full of praise for his new recruit: "Mitch is one of the best

MITCH IN MOTION

CLASSIC MITCH MITCHELL YOUTUBE CLIPS



DRUM SOLO SWEDEN

June 9, 1969

(tinyurl.com/584j96)

Some absolutely amazing black and white TV footage of a superb solo, showing Mitch at his best as he unleashes a tightly controlled and sustained barrage of tom-tom triplets and snare drum fury. Jimi carefully watches his drummer in action, while Mitch's face all but disappears in a mad flurry of hair.



DRUM SOLO ON DOUBLE KIT

(tinyurl.com/5efd4x)

Mitch goes to work on a double bass drum kit during an Experience concert in the States. He's filmed in close up and in colour, demonstrating his mastery of snare drum rudiments with an orthodox grip. Mitch clearly played many more great solos during US tours than he did even at home during his days with Jimi.



JOHN LENNON & MITCH MITCHELL 'Yer Blues'

(tinyurl.com/5hrvbx)

The ultimate supergroup. Taken from the Rolling Stones' 'Rock & Roll Circus' video. John Lennon engages in banter with Mick Jagger before the pair launch into raunchy blues with a young Eric Clapton on guitar and a smartly clad Mitch driving them all on his Gretsch drums. A taste of what might have been!

drummers. He can do anything."

As the 1967 'Summer Of Love' reached its peak, the drummer was now a pop star. In the *Melody Maker* small ads, musicians were clamouring: 'Wanted - Mitch Mitchell-style drummer.' I included him in an *MM* feature, 'The Magnificent Seven Drummers', rating Mitchell alongside Brian Bennett, Keith Moon, Jon Hiseman, Ginger Baker, Brian Davison and Bobby Elliott.

A few months after The Experience had hit the charts with 'Hey Joe' and 'Purple Haze', then conquered America at the Monterey Festival. I caught up with Mitch for a drink and a chat in the *MM*'s local pub The Red Lion, Fleet Street (where David Bowie, Viv Stanshall and Marc Bolan often dropped by). Mitch was wearing a bright green jacket, white flared trousers and had his hair sprayed in all directions. He'd been on the road with Noel Redding and Jimi for weeks and was feeling shaky and nervous. He confessed that he was glad to be back in London and able to walk the streets in hippie clothes and long hair without being threatened.

He recalled, "America's fabulous, but I couldn't live anywhere else but England. In London, if they see you with long hair people just laugh and say 'Oh, he must be in a group,' then forget it. In America they'll shout: 'Are you a boy or a girl?' England is full of eccentrics who are tolerated and everybody's much happier. London's the centre of the pop scene and everything's much faster over here. I never believed Flower Power would catch on so quickly. The West Coast? Forget it. The standard of music is no higher and the recording studios no better. The Beatles never recorded in America, did they? A few things shattered my illusions."

Elvin's kiss

Despite being a jazz lover, there were aspects he clearly didn't like. "I went to see Elvin Jones playing in a club and he was my idol ever since I started playing. But the crowds in the jazz clubs were very blasé. Nobody showed any interest at all. When I went to see Elvin there were only two people in a really grotty and nasty bar. I told the barman I'd like to say hello. Elvin said, 'English pop group, huh?' But

when he saw we were genuine, he came over and kissed me. I think we were the first people to take any interest in him for months. Then he got up to play and kept stopping the group and saying to the bass player, 'Don't ever play like that with me.' He didn't play very well for the first couple of numbers and he kept looking over at me. Then he played a ridiculous solo at the end. I could never work on the jazz scene. It's so self-destructive. Jazzmen have so much dedication, but they earn no money and their health goes. Then people look at them and say, 'It serves you right.'"

Mitch also found being a high profile member of The Experience hard to take, especially when confronted with narrow-minded New Yorkers. "You get really ignorant and violent people. They're mostly tourists from the Midwest. Then there are the junkies who come up and paw at your girl when you're walking along the street. I was staggered. We're only friendly little gnomes after all!"

One of the last times I met Mitch was at the BBC TV Centre in London when The Experience were appearing as guests on The Lulu Show in January 1969. Jimi bought me a pint of lager in the staff bar and then bought everyone else in the room a drink. He took the English convention of 'buying a round' to the ultimate conclusion. After a chat with Jimi, I went to find Mitch and Noel in their dressing room. They were very boisterous - as usual. I remembered them engaging in a deodorant spray battle in their underwear, backstage at the Rainbow Theatre, the night Jimi set his guitar on fire.

There were more hi-jinks this time, involving a piece of a brown, chocolate-like substance that Mitch had dropped down a wash basin. He was so determined to get it back that to my astonishment he got a set of spanners and began dismantling the plumbing, to shouts of encouragement from Noel.

What with me swilling lager and with Jimi, Mitch and Noel smoking like chimneys, perhaps it was no surprise when the Jimi Hendrix Experience later sabotaged 'Lulu's Show' by stopping their Experience set in the middle of a number and announcing they were going to play a Cream tune instead. Well, it was the '60s. Rock on, Mitch! **R**

► bass drum, the Hayman, the Premiers... I was in a dream. Then just to top things off, NuNu asked me if I'd like to meet the man himself. Mitch greeted me at the house wearing yellow crushed velvet trousers and a chiffon shirt and took me to his tapestry-lined listening room. He was so kind, he got me my first ever vodka and orange and played me Elvin Jones live in quadrasonic sound. Then he spoke to me about drumming and gave me some advice I will never forget: you're as good as the people you play with, so seek out the best players. I only saw him one more time, when he wandered into an Elvis Costello rehearsal. He was very friendly and had a go on my drums. I reminded him of our previous meeting but I'm not sure if he remembered. He was quite simply the best, by miles. There's so much great stuff, but the ultimate for me is the brushwork on 'Up From The Skies', the most lyrical beautiful drumming I've ever heard. My own tribute to him is the intro to 'I Don't Want to Go to Chelsea', a straight lift from Jimi Hendrix's 'Fire'. He was a very, very important man.

► LIBERTY DEVITTO BILLY JOEL

Mitch Mitchell was a major influence on my playing. His use of jazz in rock music was a huge breakthrough for my growth as a young drummer; it led me to be more open to jazz and all kinds of musical styles. I met Mitch once, only long enough to tell him I was a huge fan. His playing will live on forever in my musical journey and I will always respect him as one of the best drummers I had ever heard. Thanks, Mitch.

► GEOFF DUGMORE INDEPENDENT

Mitch was more than just a drummer he was a true artist. As a drummer he pushed the boundaries bringing together the finesse of jazz and marrying it with the energy and passion of rock music. As an influence on me I admired his musicality and his sense of fun, drive and commitment to whatever he was working on, something I have always strived to emulate. He will be sadly missed but we should all be grateful for all he has given us, a lifetime of wondrous drumming. Thanks Mitch.

► BEV BEVAN THE MOVE

I have a few fond memories of Mitch, notably from an amazing tour of Britain in 1968. The Jimi Hendrix Experience closed the show, my band The Move closed the first half. We were billed as co-headliners. Also on the show were Amen Corner, The Nice, Keith West and Tomorrow, Eire Apparent and Pink Floyd (who got to play 10 minutes!) I also remember playing a festival in Switzerland with Jimi, The Animals, Traffic, Nice and Colosseum. All of the drummers were invited to the Paiste cymbal factory and given a set of cymbals each. We also had a giant 'drum jam' - me, Mitch, Blinky Davidson, John Steele, Jon Hiseman and Jim Capaldi. Mitch had a unique, loose, sloppy, jazzy style of drumming that suited Hendrix perfectly and really complemented the records and live shows of the Jimi Hendrix Experience.

► KEITH CARLOCK STEELY DAN

We lost a true pioneer of drumming with the passing of the great Mitch Mitchell. His approach with Hendrix's trio was a huge influence on me. The open, improvisational jazz spirit, along with a daring and risk taking rock attitude really connected with me. I always think of Mitch when I play in a more organic jazz/rock guitar trio situation. There's really nothing better than that era of music when things were happening for the first time. Mitch was really creating something when he played. Unfortunately, I never had the pleasure of seeing him play live, but the recordings will be so important and special forever!

► BILL WARD BLACK SABBATH

I listened to 'Hey Joe' and I was completely drawn in by the song. Mitch's drum fills are superb and his feel is brilliant. He gave me another star to chase after, another level of accomplishment to admire and another source of pathfinder energy to learn from.