



BY RICHARD MORTON JACK

For every mediocre hippie band that sold a million records, there was an excellent one that barely registered. Ill Wind are an unfortunate example. With a sound of their own, irreproachable chops, a handful of excellent tunes and a deal with a major record label, they had every ingredient you'd think a group might need for major success. In fact the opposite was the case. Their sole album, 'Flashes', is now extremely rare and expensive, and the appalling series of blunders that peppered its path to the few shops it ever appeared in makes for truly tragicomic reading. In fact, on learning of their various woes it is hard not to conclude that more appropriate names for them would have been 'Ill Favoured', 'Ill Organised' or 'Ill Treated'.

Richard Zvonar, their rhythm guitarist, is living contradiction of the cliché "if you remember the 60s, you weren't there." His clear recollections of their fortunes not only make for interesting history in themselves, but form an intriguing insight into an era whose rock scene was so fertile that groups as gifted as his could go largely unnoticed. Richard points out that the musical backdrop to a lot of innovative 60s bands often lay in far more conventional directions. "When I got into high school at the start of the 60s it was the era of the "Bobbies", he recalls. "Bobby Darin, Bobby Vee, Bobby Vinton, Bobby Rydell, Bob B Soxx and the Blue Jeans. My taste extended a little more towards Roy Orbison, Gene Pitney, The Everly Brothers and Del

Shannon, and particularly Dion." After a brief flirtation with a high school band named the Silvertones, Richard accepted the inadequacy of his musicianship and spent the remainder of his school years developing skills that would come to fruition at college.

The seeds of Ill Wind lay at MIT, the extremely competitive university in Cambridge, Massachusetts where three of the band were studying, surely putting them in direct competition with the Zombies for the title of 'most academically qualified group of the 60s'. As a sophomore in 1965, Richard made his stage debut as part of his dormitory's music group, but it wasn't until the following fall (spent working in LA) that he bought his first electric guitar, formed a band called the Mersey Blues, and began to play bar gigs in Santa Monica. When term came around again, it was back to Boston, where fellow students Ken Frankel and Carey Mann invited him to join their folk-blues band, The Prophets (formerly The Blues Crew), fronted by Judy Bradbury.

By now Richard, in common with so many others of his generation, had fully tuned into the counter-culture: "I was already interested in unusual music and unorthodox behaviour", he says, "so I actively sought out marijuana and LSD. By the time I joined the band I was smoking regularly. We used to light up, turn on the flashing red light and listen to albums. The listening experience in those days was intensely

concentrated - it wasn't party music. In the summer of 1966 I remember being particularly into The Mothers' 'Freak Out', 'Revolver', Love, The Fugs, The Byrds (the first time I ever heard 'Eight Miles High' was live, at the Trip in Hollywood), and whatever electronic music I could find. We listened to 'Come Out' by Steve Reich incessantly."

As the group became more serious about their music, they grew dissatisfied with their name. In the summer of 1966 they held an intensive renaming session, unabashedly intending to come up with something 'hip and psychedelic'. After considering and rejecting innumerable possibilities, the name 'Ill Wind' (title of one of their early songs) arose. Enthusiasm wasn't overwhelming, but at least everyone agreed. The following day, however, as Richard and Judy walked through Boston Public Gardens, they decided they both hated the name. Calling their recently-appointed manager, Ken Frankel's brother Tom, they urgently requested another brainstorming session - but it was too late. Business cards and bumper stickers had already been ordered, and Ill Wind they were to remain.

After a spell of gigging - "Ken and Carey and I were still in school - our limit was two rehearsals and two gigs per week" - Judy decided to leave the band in late 1966, prompting them to advertise for a replacement. Three women auditioned: Priscilla Donato (later to join the Ultimate Spinach), Coco Kallis (a member of the Boston

company of "Hair" and later to release an album on Folkways), and finally Conny Devanne, wife of a graduate student (and later professor) at MIT. "In those days she had a day job as a customer services rep for a phone company", remembers Richard, "and she auditioned right after work, in her office clothes with short, frosted hair. We, of course, were wild and woolly and sceptical of 'straight' people - but as soon as she opened her mouth we decided to make an exception." With the line-up stabilised as Conny singing, Richard playing rhythm (under his stepfather's surname, Griggs), Carey on bass, Ken playing lead and Dave Kinsman on drums, the group gigged solidly throughout the new year. "Most of our work was at colleges and resorts", says Richard. "This took us from Cape Cod to Maine, and as far west as Amherst. In fact, oddly, we didn't gig that much inside Boston."

Their hard work started to pay dividends. Demo sessions were organised at Capitol, and by the summer of 1967 things started to happen in earnest. The band travelled to California where a Frankel family connection set them up with representation by the William Morris Agency. Interested in the earlier demos, a further session was organised with Capitol, where they cut two songs with producer Dick Weissman. Frustratingly, however, the Frankel brothers were busted for LSD possession ("*I believe they were charged with intent to sell*") soon afterwards and the label immediately lost interest. Though this could easily

have spelt the end for them, fortune intervened when the agency put them in touch with the legendary producer Tom Wilson, who enthusiastically snapped up Ill Wind in the autumn for his fledgling production company, Rasputin. As the band was to realise, naming it after the charismatic but untrustworthy Russian monk was about the most straightforward action Wilson ever took where they were concerned. Initially, though, they were delighted and soon signed away their recording and publishing rights to him.

Thrilled to be on the road to success, and by Richard's admission somewhat naïve, the band had little understanding of Wilson's intentions. Setting himself up as an independent producer after successful involvement with acts such as Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, The Velvet Underground and The Mothers of Invention, Wilson wanted further glory without exerting himself too much. His involvement proved to be a mixed blessing for the band - as Richard puts it, 'we did get to record an album, but we weren't happy with either the recording process or the finished result'. For all Wilson's earlier talk, on entering the studio he seemed unwilling to make the effort that the band unarguably merited. Having arranged to release their album through ABC records, he seemed determined to do the bare minimum required to get it done. "We were inexperienced and wanted a strong producer, but he spent most of the time reading the newspaper", Richard says.

The month-long sessions began in New York's Mayfair Studios in February 1968. Rather like a day job, the band worked six hours a day (six hours being the standard musician's union double session), five days a week, spread over two rooms. Despite this schedule, Richard felt that the time wasn't used to its greatest advantage.

"A lot of the tracks weren't done to our satisfaction, as Wilson had his eyes on the clock", he says. "There was a definite sense of hurry about the sessions. The instrumental tracking went pretty smoothly, since we were performing the songs just as we did live, though we could have improved a few individual parts. If we got a reasonably presentable recording, we'd tend to move on. As we came closer to having enough to fill the album, the songs that were more problematic got left behind. That's what happened to my song 'Flashes', which the album was eventually named after. The vocal sessions were less good - I was suffering from chronic throat problems and turned in some poor performances, so Carey had to take over a number of my parts."

Musically, then, the sessions yielded results with which the band was satisfied, if not ecstatic. As a further setback, however (following the hasty atmosphere of the recording), Wilson excluded them from the mixing sessions. This meant that the finished product was far from what it could and should have been. As Richard bluntly puts it, 'we were in general agreement that the mixes sucked.' For example, on his song LAPD, three vocal tracks that he intended to be mixed far in the background behind a fuzz bass solo were in fact

shoved to the front, a decision he says the band found 'most distressing'.

Though *Flashes* is inconsistent, it contains some of the finest psychedelia conceivable. The first track, 'Walking and Singing', is a cheerful, upbeat country-tinged pop number with a decent if short guitar solo and some rather corny whistling, courtesy of Richard. The song in no way prepares the listener for the next track, 'People of the Night', which shows Conny Devaney to have had one of the finest female rock voices of the late 60s. Cold, piercingly clear, yet still capable of surprising bursts of emotion, it perfectly accompanies the beauty and intensity of the song, which centres on an epic five minute-long Eastern-tinged guitar solo that kicks in after a minute and a half and never stops gathering momentum over an ever more frantic rhythm section, expressing all of the decade's optimism and proving Ken Frankel to be one of its more distinctive guitarists. "In live performance Ken and Carey would always agree beforehand on what mode to play the raga section in - the recorded version is one of the more conservative choices", says Zvonar of it today. It's simply one of the great psychedelic excursions. After that exhausting tour de force comes 'Little Man', a worthy if more workmanlike song, whose lengthy instrumental

introduction comes close to noodling at times. Next, however, is another masterpiece, 'My Dark World', one of the most personal and beautiful of all psychedelic recordings and a moving song by any standards. Devaney's voice at its most sensitive, and the band provides perfectly judged support. The unusual fuzz bass solo is a particular joy, sombre and deeply pitched. By contrast, its follower, 'LAPD' sounds like a largely soporific hippie manifesto, although given that Zvonar claims "I don't consider this to be a hippie song in any degree - it was a flat out, enraged political protest song", it appears it may have been mastered too slow, illustrating the frustrating fact that much of the album does not sound as it should. The song has its moments (especially where the lead is concerned), but is disappointing overall, its final refrain of 'we are the people' (echoing the chant that rose up from protesters when ordered to disperse by the Los Angeles police) being the sort of thing that gets 60s music a bad name in certain quarters.

Side two opens with Billy Ed Wheeler's 'High Flying Bird', the album's only cover version and another winner. The beat is as steady and hard-hitting as anything in Krautrock, and Devaney's voice lends a pathos offered in no other version.

The guitar solo here is excellent as well, helping to make this perhaps the finest of all the song's many recordings. Next up is another terrific song, 'Hung Up Chick', with an instantly catchy riff and hypnotic, propulsive drumming. The solo is excellent for the most part, but for one rather awkward moment when it seems to be coming apart. Along with 'People of the Night' and 'High Flying Bird', this performance demonstrates just what a finely honed group of musicians Ill Wind were. The next number, 'Sleep', is a decent enough upbeat tune



ILL WIND  
617/547-0695

with unusual banjo-picking running through it and an interestingly layered chorus. The album ends with 'Full Cycle', neatly summarising the album's strengths and weaknesses. Starting with a beautiful bassline and spidery guitar lick, the song is gradually swamped by over-heavy harmonies and a somewhat ponderous mix. But for these setbacks it would be a wonderfully drowsy, downbeat closer. Though the musicianship is beyond reproach, the song must be called another disappointment overall. It's hard not to conclude that, had the band been given more encouragement and time by Wilson, and been party to the mix, they could have sharpened up a number of these performances and produced one of the very finest albums of the period. As it is, we must merely be grateful that it came to be recorded at all.

Unfortunately, the group's troubles did not end in the recording studio. The sleeve, true to form, turned out to be what Richard calls 'a sad story'. The group had a cover mocked up by a Boston collage artist whose work they were enthusiastic about. 'He had a design that was an amazing construction of images from magazines and other print sources. He came out to the studio in New York to show it to Wilson and make a deal, but left the meeting in shock because Wilson insisted that he'd have to get clearances for all the scores of individual images!' In its place, the group was obliged to obey Wilson's instructions to attend a photo session in a New York loft studio one frozen winter's day in 1968. 'We were miserable with the cold', Richard recalls, 'and we even look it in the photo. The photographers crumpled up some black photo backdrop paper so as to make it look like we were in the middle of a lava flow, and they ran a fog machine. Wilson told us the image would be processed to look all swirly and psychedelic, but instead it was just used straight.' The results are indeed unpromising – a group of truly wasted-looking beatniks pose moodily in hippie threads, surrounded by vague puffs of theatrical smoke. As if that wasn't bad enough, the solarised photographs on the back cover 'looked great in the original, but when the cover was printed it was too dark, so the result looked like a set of black rectangles'.

Not content with their blunders so



far, on the label the song titles are in the wrong order, and (to add a final insult to the group's catalogue of injuries) the sleeve credits the group as 'The Ill Wind', though they never used the article themselves. The most devastating setback of all, however, only became apparent when the album had been pressed and shipped. On 'High Flying Bird', a second of silence intrudes at the most intense point in the song, and then the crescendo is repeated three times, much diminishing its impact. "The mastering error is a true mystery", says Richard. "I cannot imagine such a thing happening by accident – it seems more like someone's drug-induced editing brainstorm." Either way, the band had no means of intervening, and all of the initial 10,000 copies went out like that. The glitch is very annoying and it is to be hoped that those who pay top money for originals get lucky – a subsequent and much smaller pressing of 2000 copies corrects the fault.

Despite the group's numerous disappointments thus far, they had much to focus on in the run-up to the album's release. A well-organised publicity campaign could well have been the key to the record's success, but it was not to be. A full-page promotional ad was taken out in *Billboard* (advertising 'Flashes' alongside two other Rasputin releases), a few other minor ads appeared in rock publications, and promotional copies were sent to radio

stations. Mysteriously, three singles were extracted ('Walking and Singing' b/w 'High Flying Bird', 'Dark World' b/w 'Walking and Singing' and finally 'Dark World' b/w 'High Flying Bird'), but barely released. No interviews were organised, no airplay was arranged and to the best of Richard's knowledge, absolutely no reviews appeared anywhere. As he wryly puts it, "there was a cover story on Tom Wilson in the *New York Times* magazine, and we were mentioned in passing. That was about the height of our media exposure." A promotional tour had been organised, but the pitiful circumstances that had so far conspired against the band again intervened. "Tom Frankel and Wilson worked at cross purposes a lot of the time", remembers Richard. "Wilson had allegedly booked a tour for us, but he cancelled it at the last minute without letting Tom know. As a result Tom didn't book any new ones, so we were out of work for a month, during which Carey quit and we had to hire a replacement, Michael Walsh."

Richard also attributes a good part of this fiasco to the notorious 'Bosstown Sound' hype, whipped up by producer Alan Lorber in an attempt to cash in on the San Francisco phenomenon by presenting Boston as the next big scene. The first records to be released under this banner (by Ultimate Spinach, Beacon Street Union,

Chamaeleon Church and others) were met with pre-prepared critical scorn, and the critical backlash was well under way before 'Flashes' appeared. In particular, a scornful article by Jon Landau in *Rolling Stone* damned the Bosstown publicity. "By the time our record was released there wasn't much of a market for rock music from New England", says Richard. "Perhaps Wilson felt it wasn't worthwhile to market us in such unfavourable circumstances."

Many bands would have quit altogether in the face of this barrage of incompetence and misfortune, but Ill Wind persevered. Though their foray into the recording studio had been a debacle in many ways (they were never given any sales figures, and wild rumours that one of the singles had hit the top 20 in a couple of mid-Western cities are still unconfirmed), their live experiences were more rewarding. "We gigged from the fall of 1966 to the end of 1968", says Richard. "We always played a mixture of conventional, shorter arrangements and songs with extended instrumental jams. For example, our version of 'Satisfaction' generally turned into a lecture on the Vietnam War and the sorry state of American Society!" The band opened for many artists of the era – Chuck Berry, Fleetwood Mac, Moby Grape, Van Morrison, and even the Who, the last of which still provides Richard with happy memories.

"Townshend and Daltrey were friendly and we hung out", he recalls. "They had a road crew of only two - a small Cockney named Sweaty and his assistant (who made sure we knew he was Jim Morrison's younger brother). Entwistle and Moon kept to themselves, and it was clear that Moon was drinking heavily. He got especially carried away during their destructo-bit at the end and started throwing bits of his kit into the audience, who were busily attempting to invade the stage. This meant that Sweaty alternately had to throw bits of instruments back onto the stage and bodies back into the audience! Finally Keith staggered offstage, kicking Dave Kinsman's drum kit over on his way and smashing his fist through a window and cutting himself rather badly, which put a damper on our after gig plans."

On another memorable occasion, Richard went back to the Jefferson Airplane's hotel after a gig. "We got really ripped on weed in their room," he reminisces, "and Jack and Jorma started jamming (a preview of Hot Tuna!) The TV was on the whole time, and when the station sign-off came on, Jack fired up a small reel-to-reel tape deck and played a tape of 'A Day In The Life' they'd gotten from George Harrison! It was the first time I'd heard it." As a fan, Richard saw many of the era's greatest bands. "I frequented the Boston Tea Party [the venue where Terrastock 5 was later to be held] and saw the Yardbirds (with Jimmy Page), Spirit, the Youngbloods, Jimi Hendrix and quite a few others. The Cream were stunning, as were the Doors, whom I saw in small venues before they became highly successful." Another band that impressed him were Big Brother & the Holding Company, "not because the band were particularly good (they weren't), but because Janis was on fire and James Gurley did some fantastic noise guitar." Others were less impressive. "I never cared for the Grateful Dead", he admits. "Todd Rundgren's band, the Nazz, were pretty lame and derivative, and I saw Pink Floyd on a rainy night in a largish ballroom with only 20-30 people in the auditorium. They seemed exhausted from touring and were uninspired and uninspiring."

Eventually, however, the band wound down. "The main reason we split was because we did not want to continue working with Tom Wilson as producer. After the initial period of

our contract expired at the end of 1968, he chose to pick up his option to renew it. The only way for us to get out of it was to disband." In addition to this ludicrous scenario, Ken Frankel had married Judy Bradbury, the band's original singer, and was under pressure to move to California. Most of the extended family living with Tom Frankel in the band house took their cue, packed up and headed west. "I'd always had rather a competitive relationship with Ken," reflects Richard, "and I think I blamed him and Tom for the situation. It didn't help my frame of mind that I was dead broke, it was almost Christmas, and I'd broken a rib on my first day working on a construction site."

Ill Wind played their last gig in December 1968 at the original Boston Tea Party. "We were billed with Fleetwood Mac, on their first American tour, but they all had the flu, so on the second night they did only one set and then had the J Geils Band stand in for them. Unfortunately, they ran overtime, so we had to cut our last-ever set short," Richard remembers. This final piece of misfortune seems apposite for a group whose career was so dogged by problems of others' making. Strangely, though, they made more recordings around the time of their break-up. "I have the tapes and have been trying to restore them", he tantalises. After going their separate ways for a year, during which Richard played in a band named Slag, the group reformed in April 1970, with Carey Mann rejoining on lead guitar and organ in place of Ken Frankel. After a few months in this configuration, though, Carey quit again in the late summer. He was replaced by Larry Carsman, described by Richard as "a phenomenal musician" - but in November he also quit, to be replaced by Walter Bjorkman, another highly accomplished player. Clearly the original spirit had been lost, though, and Richard was next to leave, describing his position in the band by this stage as 'emotionally untenable'. Ill Wind hadn't quite blown out, though. They carried on with much local success as a quartet and were apparently much sought-after on the resort circuit. In the final phase, however, they did very little original material and (though they did some recording) never approached a record release.

After a final split, the group splintered in various directions, though they remain in touch with each other. Tom and Ken Frankel successfully entered the real estate business in California. Ken eventually divorced Judy Bradbury and now lives in California, where he still plays guitar. Tom eventually moved to Las Vegas and has a variety of businesses including an art gallery. He also practices Asian medicine. Carey Mann played in a variety of bands throughout the 70s, recording an album with Dirty John's Hot Dog Stand and gigging on the club circuit for a number of years, during which he also developed a highly successful career in computer technology. He still lives in Massachusetts. David Kinsman and Conny Devanney ran a booking agency together for a number of years, before David moved to Maine and started a business importing bicycle parts, which he has recently sold in order to retire. Conny organises 'estate sales' of furniture and other personal items after death but still sings on the corporate entertainment circuit, living in New England. Finally, Richard took a PhD in composition and music technology in 1982 and has worked extensively both as a musician (incorporating tours with artists such as Diamanda Galas) and intermedia artist since (generating software used by the Grateful Dead live) into an extraordinarily varied career.

Though none of the members have pursued full-time musical careers since their split, interest in 'Flashes' has steadily grown through compilation appearances, bootlegs, and particularly the collectors'

market, where copies sell for well into three figures. A recent bootleg reissue on the Afterglow label includes cuts culled from the band's earliest Boston demo sessions in 1966, and also from the Capitol demos of the following year. These were obtained from one of the members under false pretences, and cause Richard understandable irritation. A more recent bootleg by Italian label Akarma was even overseen by Alan Lorber, self-appointed king of the 60s Boston psychedelic rock scene. As Richard puts it, "Lorber never had anything to do with the band, but has made a business in recent years out of reissuing albums by Boston groups, generally without their participation." As extras, this issue also contained the demos, presumably culled from the Afterglow issue. "I'm flattered at the attention the band is getting after 35 years", he says, "but I'm also annoyed that this has been done without any consultation with us. We could have provided better quality recordings of the bonus material and corrected the errors on the sleeve." In light of these remarks, a remastered, official reissue with extra tracks would be most welcome. Richard still has their demo tapes, and even some live recordings - but hearing them, he says, is the closest we'll come to hearing the band in concert today. "We never talk about reforming", he says. "Some of us aren't playing anymore and we live on opposite coasts. It's best to let it be."

*Written and directed by Richard Morton Jack, © Ptolemaic Terrascope, 2003*

**UMBRELLAS.**




**WATERPROOF  
SILK UMBRELLAS  
FOR LADIES & GENTLEMEN.**

The Gilted Umbrella of G. FOX and CO., is not to be  
mistaken for any other. With every Umbrella a  
Shawnee is given to wear for Twelve Months.

**G. FOX and CO., Manufacturers,  
80, WOOD STREET, CHEAPSIDE.**

**UMBRELLAS  
TO SUIT  
CARRIAGES OF EVERY SHAPE  
AND SIZE.**

Engravings of Forty various kinds  
sent on application.