

## **Music 262: Rock Music, History and Social Analysis, British Blues Bands**

*[Music Playing on Piano]*

[Brian Ward]: Okay we talked about the British invasion, The Beatles, and there's another side to the British invasion and that is these British blues bands that really espoused American blues. Especially blues from Chicago, people like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, really influenced these British musicians. They imitated them and created these rock bands and came to the United States and really made a huge impact on rock n' roll in the United States. One of the main characters in this whole British blues band thing is this guy named John Mayall. John Mayall had a band called The Bluesbreakers. This band was sort of an incubation point for these young guitarists, bassists, and instrumentalists that really loved the blues. They were just big blues fans from England. They came through John Mayall's band and they were able to imitate and really hone their skills in that genre of the blues in John Mayall's band. John Mayall is known as the elder statesman of the blues because of this. He had a band called John Mayall and The Bluesbreakers. What he did was, he was a multi-instrumentalist, so he played a little piano, played a little harmonica, he'd sing a little bit. But he provided an avenue for these young, particularly guitar players from Britain to really hone their skills. Among these people were Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, really iconic guitarists of rock n' roll. They got their start in John Mayall's band.

One of the major blues bands that came out of England to America was The Yardbirds. The Yardbirds began as an R&B blues cover band. They did a lot of early recordings with blues artists including Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf, and Muddy Waters. They branched out however into more moody experimental psychedelic rock as well. They became early pioneers of psychedelic music. They used a lot of guitar effects in their band. They took a lot of risks with their music. There are three major guitarists, the ones I mentioned, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Jimmy Page that came through that band at various points. They were also known for these ad-hoc jams called raves. What they did was they took the blues and they made it more improvisational. They expanded the form and they would just jam for a long time on these songs and the guitars would take long solos. Now this wasn't typical of Chicago blues where a guitar solo or harmonica solo would be very short, brief, and to the point. With The Yardbirds and their raves, they would expand the guitar solo to last minutes and minutes long and create more of an improvisational nature with the music. Which is very important and influential to rock n' roll later on.

Another great group that came out of England was The Animals. The Animals had a lead singer Eric Burdon. He was a really great singer and a very vibrant musician. They of course started out as a clever band as well. They covered the blues and R&B hits. Like The Rolling Stones, they got their start at this place in London called The Crawdaddy Club. They went through a lot of changes. They disbanded. Eric Burdon went on to start the band War, another very popular rock n' roll band.

Now I also have to mention a band called Them. Now Them is labeled as a British invasion band but they were from Ireland. Now Them's lead singer was Van Morrison. Now Van Morrison most people know as this pop singer who sings Brown Eyed Girl and some great pop hits of the 1970s. He really got his start with the band Them, a British invasion band. They covered again, blues songs. They did it quite like the blues artists that they are originally copying. One thing to note about Van Morrison, he wrote the song Gloria. Now Gloria was a big hit for a lot of different rock n' roll bands including The Doors. He was really influential in rock n' roll for writing this song, Gloria.

Another blues and R&B band from this British invasion on the blues side of things were The Kinks. The Kinks were a little bit different though. They really maintained their English identity. They were very staunchly English in their lyrics. They sang about things about British society and the classism that was going on in England at the time. Even though they started out as a blues band, covering blues songs they went on to create their own sound really. They created a couple different styles of rock n' roll. One was very heady and intellectual, Ray Davies influenced. Another thing that they really influenced was the use of power chords. You got songs like You Really Got Me. There's these power chords that play. Now power chords are a way to play the guitar where you just block off the frets and play a chord and then you move around on the fret board with just the same shape of chord and it creates a certain sound. These chords are more rhythmic than harmonic in nature. That's really influential on the later heavy metal bands like Led Zeppelin and all the heavy metal bands that came after them. The use of these power chords.

But we really have to talk about The Rolling Stones. Now The Rolling Stones came out and they were the most popular of these British invasion blues bands. They were an alternative to The Beatles, in fact. If you were a young teenage girl in the 1960s in the United States, it took a while, but your parents might get used to you listening to The Beatles music because The Beatles music was really about happiness, peace and love, unity, and all mainly positive things. The Rolling Stones however had a whole different image. They were the bad boys of rock n' roll at the time. There was no way that your parents were going to like you listening to The Rolling Stones. The Rolling Stones were also different because they didn't wear a uniform. Everybody dressed differently on stage. That was the new thing in rock n' roll at the time. They had the lead singer, Mick Jagger who had a real rough, gruff delivery. He was really one of the first guys, first white rock n' roll singers to really get out there on stage and sing in an African American, black sort of way and not be ashamed of it and really just flaunt it. They also had Keith Richards on guitar who was also a major driving force of The Rolling Stones.

So we had these two sides to the British invasion. We had The Beatles and other bands that were Beatle like, like Peter and Gordon and the Dominoes where they sort of had this Liverpool sound. You know very Poppy sound to them. We also have the other side, the bands that I'm mentioning in this lecture, and those are the British blues influenced bands. Now The Rolling Stones also started out copying blues bands. They soon developed their own style. They

performed at The Crawdaddy Club in London. They were very popular when they hit the United States. They made a huge impact. Their manager Andrew Olson really pushed them to go in this rougher, sexier direction and it was a hugely popular move for them. They became probably the greatest rock n' roll band of all time.