The Yardbirds: Great Hits—Yardbirds—Epic

By Claudia Perry

Last month marked the ninth anniversary of the Yardbirds' dissolution; however, their contribution to the world of rock is in no way remote. More than a laboratory for the guitar styles of Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page, their music was ahead of its time in many ways, although their albums are largely unappreciated in the US. Epic Records has attempted to remedy this by re-releasing this album.

To the collector, this disc is almost a total waste of vinyl. All but two of the cuts can be found on imports that are readily available and of better quality. To the fans of the aforementioned guitarists, the record may be a useful guide to the styles that they experimented with before moving on.

The most well-represented of the trinity is Beck, who plays guitar on all the cuts except three. The other songs are Eric Clapton's contribution to the group which ended in 1964 with their first hit, "For Your Love.

That song, which opens the album, is a collaboration of some of the most talented people in English rock—"For Your Love" was written by Graham Gouldman, author of the Hollies' "Bus Stop" and late-morning "I'm A Man." One of the most-recorded group's singles, it resembles a Gregorian chant more than anything. Considering that their main chart competition were songs like "Dyin' Inpeace" and "Get Off My Cloud." makes it seem even more novel.

Beck's contribution to the Yardbirds was significant to them from most of the bands that came out of England. At the time of the group's greatest popularity, there was little to compare with Beck's guitar heroics. "I'm Sad," is the first single on which Beck appears. A radical departure from the previous Yardbirds singles, it resembles a Gregorian chant more than anything. Considering that their main chart competition were songs like "Dyin' Inpeace" and "Get Off My Cloud," makes it seem even more novel.

Beck's trailblazing continued after "Still I'm Sad" with the release of the Yardbirds' next single, "Shapes Of Things." Beck's contribution to this cut, a Mose Allison standard that every group worth their salt either recorded or included in their stage act. Beck and the Yardbirds' version of the criteria for what was to become heavy metal.

The A-side, "Shapes Of Things," was a forerunner of acid rock. Beck's feedback-riddled solo and the cutting tempo closed the song a peak single performance before it was fashionable. This song was probably the band's peak single performance and it brings an end to the first side of the album.

Opening the second side is "Train Kept A Rollin.'" A track that resurfaced on a recent Amonium album, this version is graced with the presence of Beck's guitar. Opening with a six-string train whistle, this version can be compared with the pathetic ramblings of the Boston band's lead dual.

"I Wish You Would." The next cut on the disc, appeared on the group's first American album, For Your Love. The first single that they ever released, it died quickly in England and never made it to the US. Although the recording is one of the poorer ones in existence, the band's talent shines through.

"I Ain't Done Wrong," the next cut, is a Keith Relf composition that was also on For Your Love. Relf, who died last May by accidentally electrocuting himself, was one of the best rock singers ever to stand behind a microphone. The song pales in comparison to other Relf tunes. "Farewell," a ballad on Over, Under, Sideways, Down, would have been a better choice.

Another throwaway cut is "I Ain't Got You," the next-to-last song on the album. The group's second single, it also landed on deck ears. Clapton's short but memorable solo seems to be its reason for inclusion. "Happiness Ten Years Time Ago" would have been a more explicit example of his talent.

Closing the album is the studio version of "I'm A Man." One of the few post-recorded songs in English rhythm 'n' blues history, the Yardbirds' version is the definitive one. Structured around an incredible marimba/guitar duel between Beck and Relf respectively, this song might sum up what the Yardbirds were about. Their exuberance and innovativeness are captured credibly here. It is hard to judge an album like The Yardbirds' Great Hits. The album is incredibly useful for those who want an idea of what the group was about. It is a total waste of time for those who seek Yardbirds as most of the material is available on superior imports. Even more interesting to note is the absence of Jimmy Page from the album. Due to a pending lawsuit, Page's work with the Yardbirds cannot be heard at this time. Still, it is well worth listening to as piece of rock 'n' roll history.

The MIT Shakespeare Ensemble will present Othello, the Moor of Venice, on April 20-24 at 8pm in the Sala de Puerto Rico. Tickets may be purchased in the lobby of Building 10 or reserved by calling 253-4430.

The MIT Drama shop will present Luigi Pirandello's "Six Characters In Search Of An Author" at 8pm on April 28, 39, 30, and May 6. Tickets are $2.50 for performances except opening night, when they are $3.50. For further information call 253-4720.

Emma, a new play by Howard Zinn, opens April 20 at the Next Move Theater, 955 Boylston Street Boston. For further information call 536-6769.