



The Animals, The Rolling Stones: English Artists Find 'Soul' Music Is More Than Skin Deep

by Louise Criscione
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The soul of today's music, the place "where it's at" is rhythm and blues. This type of music, this "soul", has been around the U.S. for decades now and it has always captured a small number of hard core fans, but it has only recently gained acceptance by the whole pop scene.

Ironically, R&B has been introduced to the American teenager by the British! Both the Rolling Stones and the Animals, in particular, are responsible for bringing American blues back into the spotlight, back before the eyes and listening ears of the [American] teenager.

This situation brings up an interesting question – can a white group, and particularly an English group, successfully imitate the American Negro blues sound?

Eric Burdon, lead singer for the Animals and probably one of the most "soul" singers around, does not feel that just any Caucasian can sing the blues with the authentic feel of the American Negro.

Must Feel It

"Not unless he feels it deeply or is intimately acquainted with it. So that's why the trip to the deep South was especially important to us. It gave us the opportunity to do both," Eric explained.

Hilton Valentine, lead guitarist for the Animals, elaborated on Eric's statement: "There's no escaping the fact that the blues is the music of the colored man. It has a deeper meaning in the States, especially in the deep South, where they have the racial problem and widespread discrimination against minorities."

Eric believes that in England the racial problem is entirely different. He says: "So the difficulty has been in relating ourselves to a problem across the ocean."

Perhaps the biggest and most popular R&B group on the American and English pop scene is the Rolling Stones.

The sound of the Stones has undergone something of a change. But the Stones still play "soul" – "soul" which is strongly influenced by American Negroes such as Muddy Waters, Otis Redding, and Howlin' Wolf.

No Resentment

How do these colored blues artists feel about this adoption of their sound by people within the pop field? Mick reveals: "Muddy called us 'his boys' in a magazine article so we must have some acceptance with those people."

Brian Jones agrees with Mick that the Stones have gained a certain amount of acceptance in the dark world of R&B. "We went to the Apollo Theater for the NAACP benefit show and Wilson Pickett introduced us to the audience and then did an imitation of us.

"And if James Brown is around town he calls us and leaves messages. They accept what we're trying to do," Brian continued.



The Stones now record exclusively in the U.S. Why? Do they feel that they can get their "soul" sound here and not in England?

Brian answers that question by saying: "It's a great place to cut a record and America is a great place to be generally."

R&B Capital

Although R&B has finally got a foothold in Britain, America is still the soul of the "soul" sound, and don't ever let anyone ever tell you any different.

Brian admits that: "You can't get a lot of this blues stuff back home, any more than you can go to a club and find an artist that you can learn something from."

Do the English groups learn from other English groups who attempt to make the same sort of sound, or are they exclusively tutored by the American Negro singers?

Mick answers that question by saying: "We all love to dig the real sounds of R&B, to hear the groups and the bands that have something to say. But there isn't really anything in England today that any of us would go to see expecting to learn something."

Mick summed up the entire question of Englishmen attempting to sing American "soul". "It's all right here in America. You've got to come here to get the real thing."

Room For All

But R&B is a big world – in it there is room for everybody. At least, there is room for such people as the Animals and the Rolling Stones. These people have spread the gospel of R&B to places where it had never before been preached. In doing this, they have inadvertently helped American R&B and our American R&B artists.

So next time you start to accuse the English of doing nothing but imitating the Americans – stop and think about it. Remember that such names as Muddy Waters, Wilson Pickett and Howlin' Wolf were once totally alien to the average American teenager. And now these greats in the R&B field, although still underrated and under-appreciated, are becoming much better known.

You can consider the entire question now resolved – The roots of the "soul" sound are deeply embedded in American soil, but its branches have now spread across the ocean to England.

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