

# CLAPTON: HE'S NOT RUSHING NEW BAND

A summer since the last one, a new Eric Clapton band was again causing hold ups in the London traffic on its touring debut in the capital last week. But any similarity between that and the last time our hero stepped out with a new group ends there.

Last time, you will recall, absolutely no one was permitted to remain oblivious to the prolonged machinations of Eric's plans, first with Stevie and Ginger and then with Rick Grech, until the publicity machine reached a fuse-blowing climax at the stage when even Grandad on the beach at Blackpool could read in his News Of The World of the new wonder discovery Blind Faith and its debut at the Great Hyde Park Sit-In.

Last week's was a different story. There's a good chance that you, never mind grandad, don't know who Derek and the Dominos are, or that this gloriously-named new band of Clapton's has been on the road a full three weeks. And if that's the case then it's probably because Mr Clapton wants it that way.

"Yeah it is the absolute opposite of Blind Faith," agreed Eric, talking at his manager's Mayfair offices.

"That was very frightening the Blind Faith thing, the show in the park and then straight off to huge places like the Forum in L.A."

"I got very disenchanted with the big venues but it was all very trial and error, as it was with this band."

"What we planned for Blind Faith we did in good faith; it was only when we started doing it that we realised we were wrong."

His send off for the Dominos — former Delaney and Bonnie back up men Bobby Whitlock, organ/vocals, Jim Gordon, drums, and Carl Radle, bass — couldn't have been more different.

## Building

The first gig of the current tour was at the Dagenham Roundhouse and subsequent ones have been of a similar nature; the circuit for a group building a reputation from scratch rather than one for a musician of Clapton's stature.

"We hope to work up to bigger things later," explained Eric in a masterly understatement. "This way provides good experience without too much exposure and is the best way to get a group band together. We can all stretch out more and get a better idea of what we sound like in a club."

"In a concert the sound is difficult to judge. And also it's a lot more satisfying musically. The audiences are a lot more responsive that I remembered from the past."

In a crowded room containing, among others, Dominos Gordon and Whitlock, Eric was his usual amiable self, rattling off honest, brisk and to the point answers between jokes

By NICK LOGAN

with the assembled company.

It was hard to reconcile this with the popular representation of Clapton as the "lost soul" forever in search for his musical niche.

But then, that is an image he obviously doesn't want.

"Haven't I always seemed like that?" he replied when I put it to him.

"Lots of people and the press have tried to pin that on me as an image but it is no more true of me than of anyone else. I mean I could turn that back on you and ask if all musicians aren't like that in one way or another."

He is, all the same, still trying to dodge the personality cult. "I thought I had with Blind Faith. That was the object. I thought the best way to do it was not to contribute over much and let the others set the pace and direction."

"Maybe that didn't work. I didn't get very far either with Delaney and Bonnie because some people in the audiences seemed to think that it was my band and were shouting out song titles and getting nasty because I wasn't playing more."

"The way I see it now is to change the name to something like Derek and the Dominos and get into it more."

## Incognito

To minimise the ever present danger that the band will find acceptance purely because it is his band, a clause has been inserted in the group's contracts which stipulates billing as "Derek and the Dominos" and no over use of Clapton's name as a crowd puller.

The band got started two months ago. "I had just come back from America after the Delaney and Bonnie tour," said Eric, "and sat down in a state of confusion for some time with no particular plans or whatever. Bobby (Whitlock) had left Delaney and Bonnie and came to England as an instinctive move and it all started rolling from there."

"It amazes me how much work we have got through, considering that we were rehearsing for only a month of that time."

They played their first gig at the London Lyceum then went off into hibernation. It was Tony Ashton, of Ashton, Gardner and Dyke, who came up with the joke name as Clapton's band were sitting backstage at the Lyceum wondering



DEREK and the DOMINOS (l to r) JIM GORDON, CARL RADLE, BOBBY WHITLOCK and ERIC CLAPTON.

what to call themselves.

Dave Mason was in the line up then but has since left. His album was doing well in the States, explained Eric, and he wanted to go over and follow it up with a tour.

Since the Lyceum the band has made enormous strides and those who felt that Clapton's solo album — released this week — bears a destructively heavy influence of Delaney and Bonnie will be gladdened to hear that with the Dominos on the road Eric is, without doubt, the physical and musical leader.

The night after the Marquee they played the smaller Speakeasy and woke up the blase, star packed audience with a dynamic set. It was nice to hear Eric spreading out more on guitar than he has of late and if his voice had to strain on occasions there was adequate compensation in the fact that it came over far more natural and unforced than it did on the record.

For material, the band picked the

best of Clapton's album — "Bad Boy," "Blues Power," "Bottle Of Red Wine" — but delivered with far more satisfaction, plus newer compositions by Clapton and Whitlock including a tribute to Jimi Hendrix.

The album had been a rushed job, although Eric says he is satisfied with all the performances except his. He would have liked to have done all the vocals over again.

"Some of the songs were made up in the studio," he revealed. "We did all the tracks in a week and put the voices on a month later, again in a week. You can do an album in a day and it needn't be rushed but when you go in with nothing prepared then you are rushed."

The group, states Eric emphatically, is taking all his present time. He sees it very much as a long term prospect and adds, "Nothing else crosses my mind."

"What we want is to make it into a band... a band of reknown." And he smiles.

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