

# Eric Clapton Replaces 16 Year Old Guitarist and Inspires Millions

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If you ask any guitar player for a top 10 list of their favorite guitarists, Eric Clapton will make the cut almost every time. Back in the 70's through the 90's, you would hear "Wonderful Tonight" and "Cocaine" in the music stores while young musicians tried their new guitars for the first time.

It wasn't as much of a nuisance for music shop owners as Led Zeppelin's epic Stairway to Heaven, which prompted many stores to post "No Stairway to Heaven" signs near the guitar displays. Nevertheless, it was still a frequent event. Heck, it still is. This guy was the only person to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame three times. He's an inspiration to guitarists everywhere.

Clapton can also claim some credit for all the dread locked white dudes in the USA who espouse the virtues of Rastafari and weed. He covered Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff" on his 1974 461 Ocean Boulevard album, and this quickly popularized both Marley and Reggae.

Let's look at some of his pivotal moments that made him a blues guitar sensation.

## The Yardbirds Years – 1963-1965

Clapton began his career by joining the English rock band, the Yardbirds in 1963. Anthony Topham was a 16-year-old Yardbirds member who was replaced by Clapton after his parents pressured him to leave the band.

The biggest Yardbirds hit is "For Your Love", which was released in 1965. This is the band that launched the careers of guitar greats Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page along with Clapton.

"For Your Love" has a dreamy and psychedelic feel to it, though the band was more eclectic. They were some of the pioneers of the long jams you would later hear at Grateful Dead shows and in the wild effects and distortion coming out of Jimi Hendrix's speakers. They are also now considered by some to be a prototype of heavy metal music. That's interesting for a band originally known as The Metropolis Blues Quartet in the London Metro area.

The Yardbirds definitely played the blues. After the Rolling Stones quit their regular performances at the Crawdaddy in Richmond, Surrey, England, the Yardbirds took over in late 1963. The Crawdaddy was a blues and R&B club which opened earlier the same year. They played popular blues along with original electric blues songs with a more than subtle experimental rock element.

The experimental rock vibe rubbed Clapton the wrong way. He thought they strayed too far from the blues tradition, so he left the band in 1965. Jeff Beck took his place, and Jimmy Page replaced the bassist. It wasn't long before Jimmy played the 6-string with Beck. Before you knew it, they were

winding Middle Eastern and Indian themes into their songs and paving the way for the psychedelic and hard rock eras.

## **The Cream Years – 1966-1968**

Clapton joined Cream after becoming known as one of Britain's blues masters, thanks to his adventures with both the Yardbirds and the Bluesbreakers. In 1966, while Clapton was still in the Bluesbreakers, drummer Ginger Baker asked him to join a new band with a vision of expanding on the blues-jazz style.

Cream was widely known in the USA for the rock and roll hits, "White Room" and "Sunshine of Your Love". While these songs are hardly blues, Cream largely retained a blues style. "Born Under a Bad Sign" and "Rollin' and Tumblin'" were pure electric blues. Both had old school blues vocal styles and riffs along with a mid-late 60's instrumental touch. The latter song added harmonica to the mix. The band's live shows were filled with long blues jams.

After solidifying his status as a leading world guitar legend, fights broke out within the band. They fought over the volume of their respective mics and instruments at shows, and Clapton started accusing the others of being show-offs. Some attribute these tiffs to excessive partying. Cream released a Good Bye album in 1968.

## **The Post—Cream Years**

After leaving Cream, Clapton had a few episodes with the Beatles. He added a solo to the White Album, and he joined George Harrison's band in 1968. When Harrison had a fight with the rest of the Beatles in 1968, they almost replaced him with Clapton.

Instead of joining the Beatles, Clapton formed another band, Blind Faith, with Cream's Baker and Steve Winwood. They produced one album along with the hit single, "Can't Find My Way Home".

After Blind Faith, he became a free agent and continued to do projects with other bands, one of them being John Lennon's Plastic Ono band.

As a solo artist, Clapton enjoyed relative success with the 1970 song, "Layla". However, there was a dark history behind the band. He and Duane Allman from the Allman Brothers Band played guitars on the Layla and Other Love Songs album. The two loved jamming out and working together, but then Allman started favoring gigs with his other band before dying in a motorcycle accident in 1971. His drummer, Jim Gordon, later murdered his mother and went to prison and then to a mental institution.

The history of his solo career and collaborations with world renowned artists is ongoing. I Still Do was his 23<sup>rd</sup> album, and it was released in May, 2016. He released Live in San Diego in September.

Some artists, like comedian Andy Kaufman, die early. Others, like Pee Wee Herman, suffer career ending events before they even start getting warmed up. Jimi Hendrix and GG Allin succumbed to drugs early in their careers. One of Clapton's major inspirations, Stevie Ray Vaughan, died in a helicopter crash during a tour with Clapton. We all know what happened to Janice Joplin.

But Clapton... he's still kickin' and inspiring guitarists everywhere.

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