

= Shapes of Things =

" Shapes of Things " is a song by the English rock group the Yardbirds . With its Eastern @-@ sounding , feedback @-@ laden guitar solo and anti @-@ war / pro @-@ environmental lyrics , it " can justifiably be classified as the first psychedelic rock classic " , according to music critic Richie Unterberger . The song was built on musical elements contributed by several group members in three different recording studios in the US . When it was released as a single on 25 February 1966 , it was their first composition to become a record chart hit . The song reached the pop Top 40 in several countries , but , aside from compilations , was not included on a Yardbirds ' album .

The song features Jeff Beck 's musical use of feedback , which he learned to control by finding the guitar 's resonant points and bending the strings . Music writers have called his work groundbreaking and cited its influence on Paul McCartney and Jimi Hendrix . Several live Yardbirds recordings with Beck and later with Jimmy Page have been released . In 1968 , Beck reworked it for the lead track on his debut album Truth . The new arrangement , along with other album tracks , has been described as a precursor of heavy metal . " Shapes of Things " is included in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 's permanent exhibit of the " Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll " and several artists have recorded renditions of the song .

= = Background and recording = =

By the end of 1965 , the Yardbirds had released three albums and several singles . However , except for a few B @-@ sides , their material was adapted from older blues and rhythm and blues songs or composed by songwriters not associated with the group . " I 'm a Man " , a reworking of the 1955 Bo Diddley song , was their latest Top 40 radio hit . Giorgio Gomelsky , the group 's producer and manager , arranged for the recording at Chess Records studio in Chicago during their first American tour in September 1965 . One week after the start of the group 's second US tour in December 1965 , they were again at Chess . According to drummer Jim McCarty , the Yardbirds were experimenting with their sound , but had yet been unable to translate it into a hit song :

We were really coming from not trying to create a sort of a 3 @-@ minute piece of music , it was just something that seemed natural to us . We started with the rhythm , we used a bass riff that came from a jazz record , got a groove going with that and then added a few other bits from elsewhere , other ideas that we 'd had . And I think it was a great success for us , it was a good hit record that wasn 't really selling out . And it was original .

Beck confirmed McCarty 's account and added , " Somebody 'd say , ' Let 's do something modern and exciting ; we know we can get a good blues sound , so let 's spread it out a little bit . ' It was all spur of the moment , man " . Over two days at Chess , a backing track was completed and the Yardbirds continued their American concert tour . Shortly after arriving in Hollywood , the group resumed recording at Columbia studios on 7 January and at RCA studios on 10 January 1966 . Singer Keith Relf contributed lyrics and a melody for the song .

Although Beck had been impressed with the Chess studio 's history and sound , he had been unable to complete a guitar solo to his satisfaction . " I kept changing guitar sounds all the way through . So we did two or three takes of my guitars and blended them all together . But the solo on " Shapes of Things " was pretty honest up until that feedback note that comes in over it " , he recalled . During the recording , " there was mass hysteria in the studio when I did that solo . They weren 't expecting it and it was just some weird mist coming from the East out of an amp . Giorgio was freaking out and dancing about like some tribal witch doctor " . Beck played the solo on one string ( G ) , using a 1954 Fender Esquire guitar he had purchased before the tour . Relf also benefitted from multi @-@ tracking ? two vocal tracks were recorded , allowing him to harmonise the vocal line .

= = Lyrics and composition = =

Yardbirds ' biographer Gregg Russo describes the song " a quantum leap in their development ... [

it ] proved at once progressive and commercial ? the perfect marriage of socially conscious lyrics and a driving rhythm " . Unterberger also saw the group moving into the area of social commentary that had begun with an earlier song , " You 're a Better Man Than I " . Beck biographer Martin Power describes the lyrics as pro @-@ environmental or anti @-@ war , while McCarty feels that it reflected the opposition to United States involvement in the Vietnam War . The actual lyrics are subject to interpretation :

Now the trees are almost green , but will they still be seen , when time and tide have been  
Fall into your passing hands , please don 't destroy these lands , don 't make them desert sands  
" Shapes of Things " is credited to bassist Paul Samwell @-@ Smith , Relf , and McCarty . Samwell @-@ Smith , who is also listed as the song 's musical director , believed that Beck should have also received a composer 's credit for his contributions to the song 's development .

According to music writer Keith Shadwick , their arrangement follows a " simple and economical form that allowed its message to unfold naturally , inviting the sound enhancement at which Beck and bassist Paul Samwell @-@ Smith were quickly becoming expert " . McCarty recalled that Samwell @-@ Smith got an idea for a bass line from a song by jazz pianist and composer Dave Brubeck ( identified as " Pick Up Sticks " from the 1959 Time Out album ) to which he added a marching @-@ style drum beat . As they started to develop the rhythm , chords were added ? " G and F , and then resolving it in D , each verse . " For the middle section guitar solo , the beat shifts into double @-@ time and the instrumentation heightens the tension . This rhythmic device , originally used in jazz improvisation , was the Yardbirds ' signature arrangement . Dubbed a " rave @-@ up " , it was a feature of several of their songs .

A key feature of the song is Beck 's innovative guitar playing . Shadwick comments it " suited Beck 's taste for shaping and sculpting guitar sounds through the control and manipulation of sustain and , on occasion , feedback " . Beck recalled he began incorporating feedback into his guitar solos after he realised that he could control it , adding " I started finding the resonant points on the neck where it came in best . I loved it because it was a most peculiar sound that contrasted wildly with a plucked string , this round trombone @-@ like noise coming from nowhere . In addition to feedback , Beck 's uses a musical scale and bent notes variously described as Eastern , Indian , or raga sounding . Critics and biographers have called the solo " monumental [ ly ] fuzz @-@ drenched " , " explosively warped " , and " climaxed with a solitary , gigantic burst of feedback " . For many , the song represents the Yardbirds ' creative peak , including Beck . He commented , " ' Shapes of Things ' was the pinnacle of the Yardbirds " and added " if I did nothing else , that was the best single " .

= = Releases and chart performance = =

The first mention of the single was in February 1966 , when The Beat gave it a favourable preview and mentioned that Relf had written the song in Los Angeles while the Yardbirds were there for an extended engagement at the Hullabaloo Club in Hollywood . It was released simultaneously in the UK ( Columbia DB ? 7848 ) and the US ( Epic 5 ? 9891 ) on 25 February . In the UK , the B @-@ side was " You 're a Better Man Than I " . In the US , the B @-@ side was initially " I 'm Not Talking " , but was replaced on 25 March with " New York City Blues " ( Epic 5 ? 10006 ) . The song appeared on the UK charts on 3 March and reached the peak position of number three . In the US , it entered Billboard magazine 's Hot 100 singles chart on 26 March at number 52 and peaked at number 11 on 14 May . For Billboard 's year @-@ end chart for the Top 100 singles of 1966 , " Shapes of Things " was ranked at number 93 .

The song 's first appearance on an album was in September 1966 on the UK Columbia Records various artists compilation Go , Vol . 1 . In the US , it was included as the opening track of The Yardbirds Greatest Hits , their highest charting American album . In 1971 , a version with Relf 's single vocal track was mistakenly issued in the UK on the Remember Yardbirds ' compilation . Subsequently , " Shapes of Things " has appeared on numerous Yardbirds compilations , including the comprehensive box set Train Kept A @-@ Rollin ' : The Complete Giorgio Gomelsky Productions ( re @-@ released as The Yardbirds Story ) and Rhino Records ' 2001 Ultimate !

In 1971 , a live version recorded on 30 March 1968 in New York City with Page on guitar was

included on Live Yardbirds : Featuring Jimmy Page . Relf announced the song saying " Most people thought that we could never , ever recreate the solo part on stage ; well we have a very good try at least ? Jimmy ' Magic Fingers , Grand Sorcerer of the Magic Guitar ' " . Live versions have appeared on various semi @-@ official and bootleg albums over the years . Seven are included on the 2010 rarities collection Glimpses 1963 ? 1968 , including one recorded a week after Page joined to play bass . A studio recording by the reconstituted Yardbirds in 2003 , with guitar by Steve Vai , is included on Birdland .

= = Jeff Beck Group version = =

In May 1968 , Jeff Beck re @-@ recorded " Shapes of Things " with his new band , the Jeff Beck Group , for their debut album Truth . According to Beck , vocalist Rod Stewart suggested that they record the song and Beck added , " let 's slow it down and make it dirty and evil " . Music critic Bruce Eder calls the reworking of the Yardbirds ' tune " strikingly bold ... deliberately rebuilding the song from the ground up so it sounds closer to Howlin ' Wolf " . Despite the new arrangement , the album liner notes only list the writer as Samwell @-@ Smith and on the 1991 Beckology boxed set , Chris Dreja is included along with Relf , McCarty , and Samwell @-@ Smith .

Beck continued to explore new guitar sounds and used a recently purchased Sho @-@ Bud steel guitar to create the slide fills for the song . Martin Power describes the songs ' instrumental break as " its ' pistols at dawn ' mid @-@ section , which found Jeff and [ drummer ] Micky Waller chasing each other through a maze of drum rolls , crashing cymbals , slashing chords , and creamy arpeggios " .

" Shapes of Things " was the first song on Truth and , with its aggressive , heavily @-@ amplified sound , set the tone for the album . Most of the album was recorded with Beck 's 1959 Gibson Les Paul guitar , occasionally routed through a Tone Bender fuzzbox effects pedal . Truth has been cited as the " prototype of heavy metal " ; according to Beck : " I suppose they [ the songs on Truth ] pointed towards that road , but not the heavy metal you recognise today " . Bolstered by a well @-@ received concert tour , Truth was very successful in the US , peaking at number 15 in the Billboard 200 album chart one month after its July 1968 release . In October 1968 , it was issued in the UK , but did not reach the album charts . After a concert on 11 October 1968 in Chicago , a promotional film was made of " Shapes of Things " , which is one of the few 1968 group performances caught on film .

= = Recognition and influence = =

" Shapes of Things " is included in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame list of " 500 Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll " .Q magazine placed the song at number 61 in its March 2005 list of the " 100 Greatest Guitar Tracks Ever ! " Beatles ' historian Ian MacDonald , writing in Revolution in the Head , described Beck 's solo as " groundbreaking " , while Unterberger commented that " Shapes of Things " " can justifiably be classified as the first psychedelic rock classic " . MacDonald also identified it as the likely inspiration for Paul McCartney 's guitar solo in " Taxman " . Beck biographer Annette Carson goes further by adding that it was " widely held to have inspired " McCartney . Guitarist Mike Bloomfield claimed that Beck 's use of controlled feedback in Yardbirds ' songs influenced Jimi Hendrix 's approach . Shadwick adds that Hendrix closely studied Beck 's sonic approach on " Shapes of Things " .

Several artists have recorded " Shapes of Things " over the years , some following the original and others using the Jeff Beck Group arrangement . Led Zeppelin occasionally included a portion of the song in medleys during early concert performances . During his 1999 concert appearances with the Black Crowes , Page played it following Beck 's Truth arrangement . Their rendition appears on Live at the Greek as " Shapes of Things to Come " . Other recordings have been made by the Allman Joys , Black Stone Cherry , David Bowie , Dixie Dregs , FM , Jeff Healey Band , Richie Kotzen , Gary Moore , Nazareth , Rush , Scorpions , and Michael Schenker .