



BY RICHARD MORTON JACK

For every mediocre hippie band that sold a million records, there was an excellent one that barely registered. Ill Wind are an unfortunate example. With a sound of their own, irreproachable chops, a handful of excellent tunes and a deal with a major record label, they had every ingredient you'd think a group might need for major success. In fact the opposite was the case. Their sole album, 'Flashes', is now extremely rare and expensive, and the appalling series of blunders that peppered its path to the few shops it ever appeared in makes for truly tragicomic reading. In fact, on learning of their various woes it is hard not to conclude that more appropriate names for them would have been 'Ill Favoured', 'Ill Organised' or 'Ill Treated'.

Richard Zvonar, their rhythm guitarist, is living contradiction of the cliché "if you remember the 60s, you weren't there." His clear recollections of their fortunes not only make for interesting history in themselves, but form an intriguing insight into an era whose rock scene was so fertile that groups as gifted as his could go largely unnoticed. Richard points out that the musical backdrop to a lot of innovative 60s bands often lay in far more conventional directions. "When I got into high school at the start of the 60s it was the era of the "Bobbies", he recalls. "Bobby Darin, Bobby Vee, Bobby Vinton, Bobby Rydell, Bob B Soxx and the Blue Jeans. My taste extended a little more towards Roy Orbison, Gene Pitney, The Everly Brothers and Del

Shannon, and particularly Dion." After a brief flirtation with a high school band named the Silvertones, Richard accepted the inadequacy of his musicianship and spent the remainder of his school years developing skills that would come to fruition at college.

The seeds of Ill Wind lay at MIT, the extremely competitive university in Cambridge, Massachusetts where three of the band were studying, surely putting them in direct competition with the Zombies for the title of 'most academically qualified group of the 60s'. As a sophomore in 1965, Richard made his stage debut as part of his dormitory's music group, but it wasn't until the following fall (spent working in LA) that he bought his first electric guitar, formed a band called the Mersey Blues, and began to play bar gigs in Santa Monica. When term came around again, it was back to Boston, where fellow students Ken Frankel and Carey Mann invited him to join their folk-blues band, The Prophets (formerly The Blues Crew), fronted by Judy Bradbury.

By now Richard, in common with so many others of his generation, had fully tuned into the counter-culture: "I was already interested in unusual music and unorthodox behaviour", he says, "so I actively sought out marijuana and LSD. By the time I joined the band I was smoking regularly. We used to light up, turn on the flashing red light and listen to albums. The listening experience in those days was intensely

concentrated - it wasn't party music. In the summer of 1966 I remember being particularly into The Mothers' 'Freak Out', 'Revolver', Love, The Fugs, The Byrds (the first time I ever heard 'Eight Miles High' was live, at the Trip in Hollywood), and whatever electronic music I could find. We listened to 'Come Out' by Steve Reich incessantly."

As the group became more serious about their music, they grew dissatisfied with their name. In the summer of 1966 they held an intensive renaming session, unabashedly intending to come up with something 'hip and psychedelic'. After considering and rejecting innumerable possibilities, the name 'Ill Wind' (title of one of their early songs) arose. Enthusiasm wasn't overwhelming, but at least everyone agreed. The following day, however, as Richard and Judy walked through Boston Public Gardens, they decided they both hated the name. Calling their recently-appointed manager, Ken Frankel's brother Tom, they urgently requested another brainstorming session - but it was too late. Business cards and bumper stickers had already been ordered, and Ill Wind they were to remain.

After a spell of gigging - "Ken and Carey and I were still in school - our limit was two rehearsals and two gigs per week" - Judy decided to leave the band in late 1966, prompting them to advertise for a replacement. Three women auditioned: Priscilla Donato (later to join the Ultimate Spinach), Coco Kallis (a member of the Boston

company of "Hair" and later to release an album on Folkways), and finally Conny Devanney, wife of a graduate student (and later professor) at MIT. "In those days she had a day job as a customer services rep for a phone company", remembers Richard, "and she auditioned right after work, in her office clothes with short, frosted hair. We, of course, were wild and woolly and sceptical of 'straight' people - but as soon as she opened her mouth we decided to make an exception." With the lineup stabilised as Conny singing, Richard playing rhythm (under his stepfather's surname, Griggs), Carey on bass, Ken playing lead and Dave Kinsman on drums, the group gigged solidly throughout the new year. "Most of our work was at colleges and resorts", says Richard. "This took us from Cape Cod to Maine, and as far west as Amherst. In fact, oddly, we didn't gig that much inside Boston."

Their hard work started to pay dividends. Demo sessions were organised at Capitol, and by the summer of 1967 things started to happen in earnest. The band travelled to California where a Frankel family connection set them up with representation by the William Morris Agency. Interested in the earlier demos, a further session was organised with Capitol, where they cut two songs with producer Dick Weissman. Frustratingly, however, the Frankel brothers were busted for LSD possession ("I believe they were charged with intent to sell") soon afterwards and the label immediately lost interest. Though this could easily