

have spelt the end for them, fortune intervened when the agency put them in touch with the legendary producer Tom Wilson, who enthusiastically snapped up Ill Wind in the autumn for his fledgling production company, Rasputin. As the band was to realise, naming it after the charismatic but untrustworthy Russian monk was about the most straightforward action Wilson ever took where they were concerned. Initially, though, they were delighted and soon signed away their recording and publishing rights to him.

Thrilled to be on the road to success, and by Richard's admission somewhat naïve, the band had little understanding of Wilson's intentions. Setting himself up as an independent producer after successful involvement with acts such as Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, The Velvet Underground and The Mothers of Invention, Wilson wanted further glory without exerting himself too much. His involvement proved to be a mixed blessing for the band - as Richard puts it, 'we did get to record an album, but we weren't happy with either the recording process or the finished result'. For all Wilson's earlier talk, on entering the studio he seemed unwilling to make the effort that the band unarguably merited. Having arranged to release their album through ABC records, he seemed determined to do the bare minimum required to get it done. "We were inexperienced and wanted a strong producer, but he spent most of the time reading the newspaper", Richard says.

The month-long sessions began in New York's Mayfair Studios in February 1968. Rather like a day job, the band worked six hours a day (six hours being the standard musician's union double session), five days a week, spread over two rooms. Despite this schedule, Richard felt that the time wasn't used to its greatest advantage.

"A lot of the tracks weren't done to our satisfaction, as Wilson had his eyes on the clock", he says. "There was a definite sense of hurry about the sessions. The instrumental tracking went pretty smoothly, since we were performing the songs just as we did live, though we could have improved a few individual parts. If we got a reasonably presentable recording, we'd tend to move on. As we came closer to having enough to fill the album, the songs that were more problematic got left behind. That's what happened to my song 'Flashes', which the album was eventually named after. The vocal sessions were less good - I was suffering from chronic throat problems and turned in some poor performances, so Carey had to take over a number of my parts."

Musically, then, the sessions yielded results with which the band was satisfied, if not ecstatic. As a further setback, however (following the hasty atmosphere of the recording), Wilson excluded them from the mixing sessions. This meant that the finished product was far from what it could and should have been. As Richard bluntly puts it, 'we were in general agreement that the mixes sucked.' For example, on his song LAPD, three vocal tracks that he intended to be mixed far in the background behind a fuzz bass solo were in fact

shoved to the front, a decision he says the band found 'most distressing'.

Though *Flashes* is inconsistent, it contains some of the finest psychedelia conceivable. The first track, 'Walking and Singing', is a cheerful, upbeat country-tinged pop number with a decent if short guitar solo and some rather corny whistling, courtesy of Richard. The song in no way prepares the listener for the next track, 'People of the Night', which shows Conny Devanney to have had one of the finest female rock voices of the late 60s. Cold, piercingly clear, yet still capable of surprising bursts of emotion, it perfectly accompanies the beauty and intensity of the song, which centres on an epic five minute-long Eastern-tinged guitar solo that kicks in after a minute and a half and never stops gathering momentum over an ever more frantic rhythm section, expressing all of the decade's optimism and proving Ken Frankel to be one of its more distinctive guitarists. "In live performance Ken and Carey would always agree beforehand on what mode to play the raga section in - the recorded version is one of the more conservative choices", says Zvonar of it today. It's simply one of the great psychedelic excursions. After that exhausting tour de force comes 'Little Man', a worthy if more workmanlike song, whose lengthy instrumental

introduction comes close to noodling at times. Next, however, is another masterpiece, 'My Dark World', one of the most personal and beautiful of all psychedelic recordings and a moving song by any standards. Devanney's voice at its most sensitive, and the band provides perfectly judged support. The unusual fuzz bass solo is a particular joy, sombre and deeply pitched. By contrast, its follower, 'LAPD' sounds like a largely soporific hippie manifesto, although given that Zvonar claims "I don't consider this to be a hippie song in any degree - it was a flat out, enraged political protest song", it appears it may have been mastered too slow, illustrating the frustrating fact that much of the album does not sound as it should. The song has its moments (especially where the lead is concerned), but is disappointing overall, its final refrain of 'we are the people' (echoing the chant that rose up from protesters when ordered to disperse by the Los Angeles police) being the sort of thing that gets 60s music a bad name in certain quarters.

Side two opens with Billy Ed Wheeler's 'High Flying Bird', the album's only cover version and another winner. The beat is as steady and hard-hitting as anything in Krautrock, and Devanney's voice lends a pathos offered in no other version.



*Ill Wind pictured with Judy Bradbury*

The guitar solo here is excellent as well, helping to make this perhaps the finest of all the song's many recordings. Next up is another terrific song, 'Hung Up Chick', with an instantly catchy riff and hypnotic, propulsive drumming. The solo is excellent for the most part, but for one rather awkward moment when it seems to be coming apart. Along with 'People of the Night' and 'High Flying Bird', this performance demonstrates just what a finely honed group of musicians Ill Wind were. The next number, 'Sleep', is a decent enough upbeat tune