

with unusual banjo-picking running through it and an interestingly layered chorus. The album ends with 'Full Cycle', neatly summarising the album's strengths and weaknesses. Starting with a beautiful bassline and spidery guitar lick, the song is gradually swamped by over-heavy harmonies and a somewhat ponderous mix. But for these setbacks it would be a wonderfully drowsy, downbeat closer. Though the musicianship is beyond reproach, the song must be called another disappointment overall. It's hard not to conclude that, had the band been given more encouragement and time by Wilson, and been party to the mix, they could have sharpened up a number of these performances and produced one of the very finest albums of the period. As it is, we must merely be grateful that it came to be recorded at all.

Unfortunately, the group's troubles did not end in the recording studio. The sleeve, true to form, turned out to be what Richard calls 'a sad story'. The group had a cover mocked up by a Boston collage artist whose work they were enthusiastic about. He had a design that was an amazing construction of images from magazines and other print sources. He came out to the studio in New York to show it to Wilson and make a deal, but left the meeting in shock because Wilson insisted that he'd have to get clearances for all the scores of individual images! In its place, the group was obliged to obey Wilson's instructions to attend a photo session in a New York loft studio one frozen winter's day in 1968. 'We were miserable with the cold', Richard recalls, 'and we even look in the photo. The photographers crumpled up some black photo backdrop paper so as to make it look like we were in the middle of a lava flow, and they ran a fog machine. Wilson told us the image would be processed to look all swirly and psychedelic, but instead it was just used straight.' The results are indeed unpromising – a group of truly wasted-looking beatniks pose moodily in hippie threads, surrounded by vague puffs of theatrical smoke. As if that wasn't bad enough, the solarised photographs on the back cover 'looked great in the original, but when the cover was printed it was too dark, so the result looked like a set of black rectangles'.

Not content with their blunders so



*Ill Wind at Hatch Shell, 1970*

far, on the label the song titles are in the wrong order, and (to add a final insult to the group's catalogue of injuries) the sleeve credits the group as 'The Ill Wind', though they never used the article themselves. The most devastating setback of all, however, only became apparent when the album had been pressed and shipped. On 'High Flying Bird', a second of silence intrudes at the most intense point in the song, and then the crescendo is repeated three times, much diminishing its impact. "The mastering error is a true mystery", says Richard. "I cannot imagine such a thing happening by accident – it seems more like someone's drug-induced editing brainstorm." Either way, the band had no means of intervening, and all of the initial 10,000 copies went out like that. The glitch is very annoying and it is to be hoped that those who pay top money for originals get lucky – a subsequent and much smaller pressing of 2000 copies corrects the fault.

Despite the group's numerous disappointments thus far, they had much to focus on in the run-up to the album's release. A well-organised publicity campaign could well have been the key to the record's success, but it was not to be. A full-page promotional ad was taken out in Billboard (advertising 'Flashes' alongside two other Rasputin releases), a few other minor ads appeared in rock publications, and promotional copies were sent to radio

stations. Mysteriously, three singles were extracted ('Walking and Singing' b/w 'High Flying Bird', 'Dark World' b/w 'Walking and Singing' and finally 'Dark World' b/w 'High Flying Bird'), but barely released. No interviews were organised, no airplay was arranged and to the best of Richard's knowledge, absolutely no reviews appeared anywhere. As he wryly puts it, "there was a cover story on Tom Wilson in the New York Times magazine, and we were mentioned in passing. That was about the height of our media exposure." A promotional tour had been organised, but the pitiful circumstances that had so far conspired against the band again intervened. "Tom Frankel and Wilson worked at cross purposes a lot of the time", remembers Richard. "Wilson had allegedly booked a tour for us, but he cancelled it at the last minute without letting Tom know. As a result Tom didn't book any new ones, so we were out of work for a month, during which Carey quit and we had to hire a replacement, Michael Walsh."

Richard also attributes a good part of this fiasco to the notorious 'Bostown Sound' hype, whipped up by producer Alan Lorber in an attempt to cash in on the San Francisco phenomenon by presenting Boston as the next big scene. The first records to be released under this banner (by Ultimate Spinach, Beacon Street Union,

Chamaeleon Church and others) were met with pre-prepared critical scorn, and the critical backlash was well under way before 'Flashes' appeared. In particular, a scornful article by Jon Landau in Rolling Stone damned the Bostown publicity. "By the time our record was released there wasn't much of a market for rock music from New England", says Richard. "Perhaps Wilson felt it wasn't worthwhile to market us in such unfavourable circumstances."

Many bands would have quit altogether in the face of this barrage of incompetence and misfortune, but Ill Wind persevered. Though their foray into the recording studio had been a debacle in many ways (they were never given any sales figures, and wild rumours that one of the singles had hit the top 20 in a couple of mid-Western cities are still unconfirmed), their live experiences were more rewarding. "We gigged from the fall of 1966 to the end of 1968", says Richard. "We always played a mixture of conventional, shorter arrangements and songs with extended instrumental jams. For example, our version of 'Satisfaction' generally turned into a lecture on the Vietnam War and the sorry state of American Society!" The band opened for many artists of the era – Chuck Berry, Fleetwood Mac, Moby Grape, Van Morrison, and even the Who, the last of which still provides Richard with happy memories.