

# BOISDALE

*Life*

## THE ZOMBIES

1960s greats take their place at rock's top table

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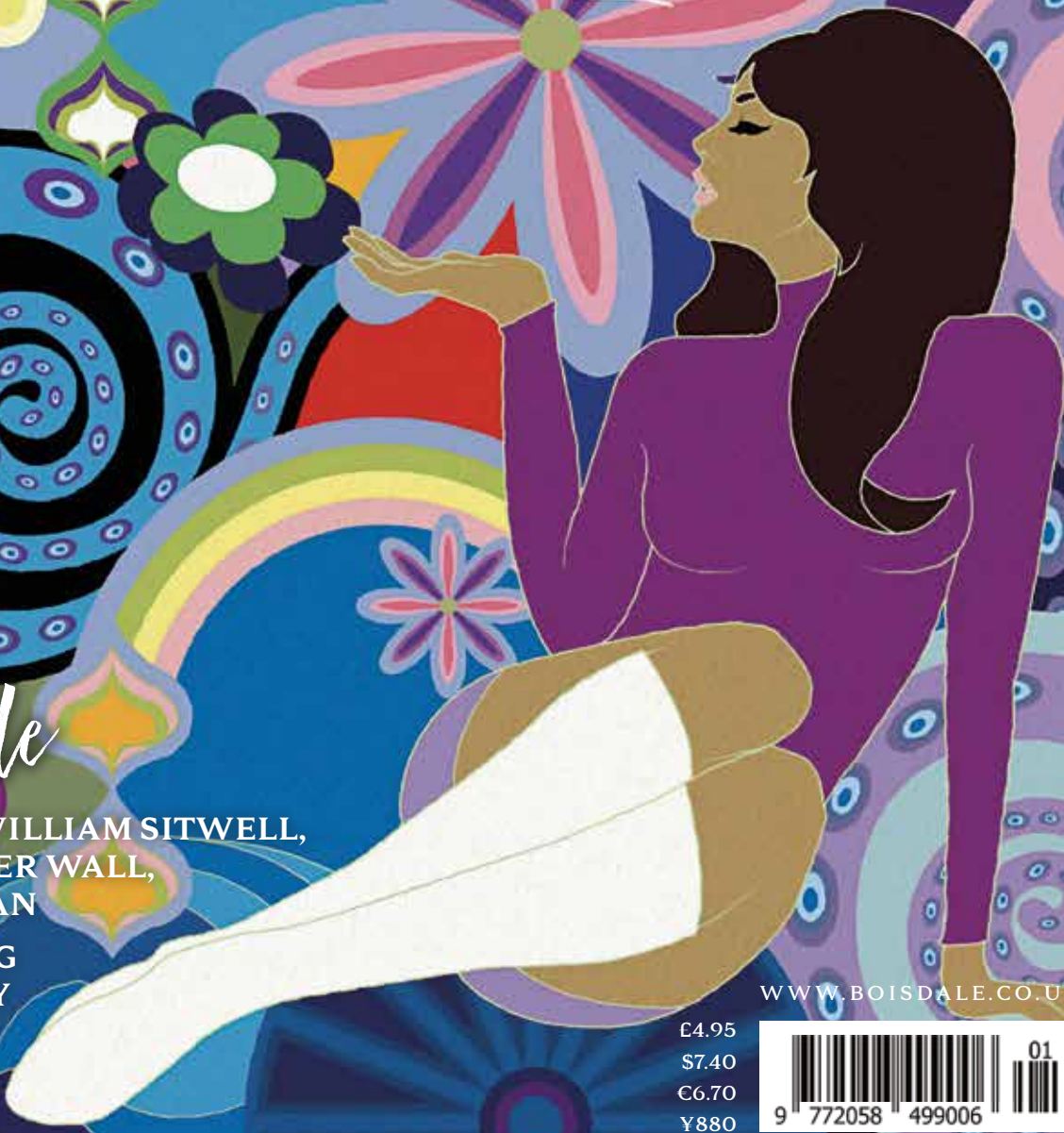
Bill Knott's gastronomic magical mystery tour

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Right: the Zombies in their heyday. From left, Hugh Grundy, Paul Atkinson, Colin Blunstone, Chris White, Rod Argent. Below: White, Grundy, Argent, Blunstone today (Paul Atkinson died in 2004)



NIGEL PAQUETTE; MILES WILLIUS; STUDIO LAU

SPOTLIGHT

# THE ZOMBIES LIVE AGAIN

In March, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductees The Zombies played two rare shows at Boisdale of Canary Wharf. Jonathan Wingate met the creators of some of the 1960s' finest psychedelic music

They may now be in their seventies, but when we meet in a private dining room at Boisdale, Colin Blunstone and Rod Argent are both fizzing with the effervescent enthusiasm of teenagers. It's not surprising when you consider that the Zombies, the band they formed in St Albans in 1962, are now enjoying the sort of success many of their contemporaries could only dream of.

"Elvis Presley was the first person ever to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and to think that we are on the same roll of honour as Elvis, Miles Davis, Ray Charles and all of my heroes is a career-defining moment for us," Argent says. "There have only been

about 300 inductees since it started, and yet there we are alongside all of these true legends. The extraordinary thing is that on 29th March [the date of the induction ceremony] it's going to be exactly 50 years to the day since we reached Number 1 in America with *Time Of The Season*."

The band were all still at school when they got together. Although they immediately felt they had something that set them aside from other local groups, they didn't seriously consider playing rock & roll for a living until early 1964, when they won a local battle of the bands contest.

"When Colin showed up at the Pioneer Club in St. Albans for our first



Rod Argent (left) and Colin Blunstone performing a rare acoustic performance at Boisdale of Canary Wharf in March

rehearsal, he had two black eyes and a broken nose, which he'd got playing rugby," Argent chuckles. "I thought – Oh no, what have we got here?"

"Rod was originally supposed to be the lead singer and I was playing guitar," Blunstone recalls. "I had only just met him, so I didn't even know his name. We stopped for a break and Rod started playing this old upright piano in the corner of the room. He was so much more advanced than the rest of us. I told him he was so good that he had to play keyboards. After we finished, I was singing this Ricky Nelson song to myself while I was putting my guitar away, and Rod said – 'I'll tell you what – if you'll be the lead singer, I'll play keyboards,' and that is basically how the Zombies came together."

The other members were Chris White (bass and co-songwriting with Argent), Hugh Grundy (drums) and Paul Atkinson (guitar). In 1964 the Zombies signed a deal with the record label Decca, and went into the studio to record their first single, *She's Not There*.

"It was a big hit over here, and by Christmas we were Number 1 in America," says Argent. "We became the

first British band after the Beatles to top the US charts with a self-written song. It was incredibly exciting. I was naïve and arrogant enough to think this is what happens, because I didn't know anything of the pitfalls of the music business. Of course, it didn't happen with the next record and we thought, 'hang on a minute. What's going on here?'"

The multi-million selling *She's Not There* immediately turned the Zombies into one of the biggest British Invasion bands, and they found themselves playing in New York alongside the Shirelles, the Shangri-Las, the Drifters and Dionne Warwick.

"I think we played six shows a day to an almost all-black audience," Blunstone remembers. "We were just a bunch of skinny young white kids from St. Albans, so we thought it might be a little bit difficult, but people loved us. We'd absorbed everything we could get from America, so it was definitely a case of coals to Newcastle. All the girls were screaming, and we were doing what we loved. We were living in a fantasy."

A few months later during one of their first US tours, the band were doing

an interview in Memphis when the journalist asked if they would like to go over to Graceland to see Elvis: "We just knocked on the front door and said – Is Elvis in?" Blunstone laughs. "His dad came to the door and said – 'He's making a film in Hawaii, but he would have loved to have met you. If you want to have a look around and hang out, come in.' We didn't believe a word of that, although we later found out that he actually had our records on his jukebox."

Although their second US single, *Tell Her No*, reached the Top 10, momentum for the Zombies then stalled, with subsequent singles failing to chart.

"I think we all perceived the band as being unsuccessful by that point," Blunstone says. "We looked at everything in a one-dimensional way, so we only really thought about having hits in the UK and the States. We eventually realised that we actually always had a hit somewhere in the world."

In 1967, the Zombies were sent on tour to the Far East, expecting to play tiny shows in hotel bars. "We played 10 shows at the Araneta Coliseum in the Philippines to 32,000 people a night, yet we were being paid £80 per show



## TURN ON, TUNE IN, DROP OUT THE BEST PSYCHEDELIC ALBUMS OF ALL TIME



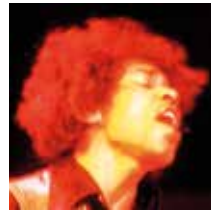
### THE BEATLES SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND

The most ambitious album by the greatest band of all time, Sgt. Pepper is the Beatles at the peak of their powers – a mind-blowing mix of pop, art and psychedelia that still sounds astonishingly adventurous over half a century on.



### LOVE FOREVER CHANGES

Sgt. Pepper may be the album that perfectly encapsulated the psychedelic period, but for the relatively small number of enlightened souls who actually owned *Forever Changes*, 1967 was the summer of Love.



### THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE ELECTRIC LADYLAND

A fuzzy, buzzy trip from beginning to end, the third and final Jimi Hendrix Experience album found the band taking their strange brew of rock, funk and psychedelic experimentation to the absolute limit.



### THE VELVET UNDER- GROUND THE VELVET UNDER- GROUND & NICO

For the people who preferred black to paisley, this was the record to lose yourself in. A deliciously dark blend of druggie psychedelia, dreamy pop, garage rock and sonic minimalism.



### PINK FLOYD THE PIPER AT THE GATES OF DAWN

The only Floyd album recorded entirely with Syd Barrett as leader, their debut is a weird and whimsical stew of psychedelic pop and spaced out rock and roll for those who really decide to turn on, tune in and drop out.



between us,” says Blunstone. “We left our manager after that, and although we did go and see another agent, he didn’t seem particularly interested. That sort of reinforced the way we were feeling at that point. We were tired and depleted, and we felt under-appreciated.”

Nevertheless, the Zombies signed a new record deal with CBS and started working on their second album. The budget was a mere £1,000, with recording sessions beginning at Abbey Road Studios in June 1967, the week the Beatles had finished working on Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.

“It was fortunate, because we were able to use the Beatles’ engineers, who had made huge technological advances with them,” Blunstone recalls, noting that the Fab Four had also left several of their instruments behind. This included John Lennon’s mellotron, the tape-delay keyboard made famous on Sgt. Pepper’s Strawberry Fields Forever. “If he hadn’t left it behind, Odessey and Oracle would have been a completely different album,” Blunstone says.

Recorded over three months, Odessey and Oracle features a string of ageless songs including This Will Be Our Year, Care Of Cell 44 and Time Of The Season. It’s an album that still seems both fresh and familiar, like the missing link between the Beach Boys’ Pet Sounds and Love’s Forever Changes. A psychedelic blend of ornate baroque pop and rock & roll that perfectly encapsulated the sound of the Summer of Love. Time Of The Season was the last song recorded.

“We were running out of studio time and they’d only finished writing it the morning before the session,” Blunstone says. “I wasn’t really on top of the phrasing and Rod was coaching me from the control room. I was getting more and more tense and I ended up saying: ‘If you’re so f\_ing good, you come and sing it!’ and Rod was going: ‘You’re the



The psychedelic album cover for Odessey and Oracle. The misspelling of the word ‘Odessey’ was a mistake by graphic designer Terry Quirk. Rolling Stone magazine ranked it 100 on its list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time

f\_ing lead singer. You stand there until you get it right.’ It always makes me laugh that I’m singing ‘It’s the time of the season for loving’ and we’re both looking daggers at each other.”

More than half a century after it was recorded, Odessey and Oracle is now considered one of the finest albums of all time, yet it was a commercial failure when it came out.

“Time of the Season went to Number 1 in the States a year after the album had been released, but by then we’d already decided to call it a day,” Argent explains. “Chris White and I always had a very good income from songwriting royalties, but the other guys weren’t making any money and had families to support.”

Blunstone confirms this. “When the band finished, I was living at home with my parents and I only had £500 in the bank,” he says. “I knew we’d had these

huge hit records, so I was wondering where all the money had gone. I felt a lot of resentment towards our management. My dad said to me – ‘If you think you’re just going to sit around the house and do nothing for the rest of your life, you’ve got another thing coming.’ So I got a job working in the burglary department of Sun Alliance. I stayed for a year until Time Of The Season became a hit and all these offers started coming in, and then I reluctantly had to retire from my insurance career.”

Although Argent and Blunstone both enjoyed success after the band split up, the Zombies music never went away. In 1999 the band reunited for what was expected to be a handful of concerts, and haven’t stopped touring and recording ever since, while their songs have reached new generations of fans.

“The enduring appeal of our music is astonishing,” Blunstone says. “When you realise that, besides our peers in the music industry, 320,000 fans voted for us to be in the Hall of Fame, it really helps validate what we’ve been doing all these years. At the induction ceremony, I think we will probably play She’s Not There, Time Of The Season and This Will Be Our Year, because it does seem to be. It’s been a long time coming, but good things are worth waiting for.”

*The Zombies - In The Beginning vinyl box set is out now on Demon Records* 



## JOINING THE ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME

Inductees to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame are voted for each year by a 500-strong committee of industry experts, academics, producers and musicians. Besides the Zombies, this year’s inductees include Radiohead, the Cure, Def Leppard, Janet Jackson, Stevie Nicks and Roxy Music. [rockhall.com](http://rockhall.com)