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Issue 1101
April 1, 2010
\$4.99
rollingstone.com

\$4.99US



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A photograph of Jimi Hendrix lying in tall grass, wearing bright red pants and a red jacket, holding a cigarette.

JIMI'S LAST RIDE

Epic plans, earthly troubles
and sweet music: The guitar
god's frenetic final months
and lost recordings

BY DAVID ERICKE

Hendrix on tour
in Germany on
September 6th,
1970, 12 days
before he died



ON THE EVENING OF AUGUST 26th, 1970, Jimi Hendrix walked through the street-level door at 52 West 8th Street in New York's Greenwich Village into paradise.

Electric Lady Studios was the guitarist's own state-of-the-art recording facility, and he had personally supervised many of its psychedelic details, like the mural of an elfin woman at the console of a spaceship. Tonight was the official opening party. Guests including guitarist Johnny Winter, Yoko Ono and Fleetwood Mac drummer Mick Fleetwood enjoyed Japanese food in Studio A, where Hendrix usually had stacks of amplifiers.

Hendrix, however, avoided the crush. One of rock's most flamboyant showmen but a reserved, intensely shy man offstage, he was remote and despondent, spending much of the night sitting in a barber chair in a quiet corner of the reception area.

It would be his last night at Electric Lady. Hendrix died in London three weeks later. He was 27.

The studio that was supposed to be Hendrix's sanctuary was also a source of stress and frustration. He was scrambling for money despite hit-record sales to fund the construction at Electric Lady; changing band lineups; and battling his manager. But even at a low ebb, he was looking, as he put it in one song at the time, "Straight Ahead."

The Seattle-born guitarist had already revolutionized the blues roots, amplified fury and orchestral future of the electric guitar on three worldwide-hit albums—1967's *Are You Experienced*, 1968's *Axsis: Bold as Love* and the '68 double album *Electric Ladyland*—made with the Jimi Hendrix Experience: the British rhythm section of drummer Mitch Mitchell and bassist Noel Redding. There had also been constant touring and growing tensions, especially with Redding over money and the latter's own ambitions as a singer and songwriter. Even before Hendrix broke up the Experience in mid-'69, he was pushing his music beyond electric blues and acid rock, recording with jazz and soul players such as drummer Buddy Miles, bassist Dave Holland and future Mahavishnu Orchestra guitarist John McLaughlin.

"My initial success was a step in the right direction," Hendrix said in a June 1969 interview, as Electric Lady's construction was getting under way, "but it

was only a step, just a change. Now I plan to get into other things. A couple of years ago, all I wanted was to be heard. 'Let me in' was the thing. Now I'm trying to figure out the wisest way to be heard."

Located under a movie theater in a space that was most recently Generation, a rock club, with a striking brick facade that stuck out over the pavement like a pregnant woman's belly, Electric Lady was conceived by Hendrix, with his manager, Michael Jeffrey, and his stalwart recording engineer, Eddie Kramer, in early 1969. Design and construction took more than a year. The final cost was about \$1 million.

It was a historic enterprise. Electric Lady was the first major commercial studio in New York created specially for and owned by a Sixties rock star. In comparison, the Beatles and Bob Dylan mostly recorded in facilities owned by their record labels, according to strict corporate rules. For years, at Abbey Road in London,

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the Beatles worked with studio engineers who were required to dress in white lab coats.

For Hendrix, Electric Lady was also a refuge from the whirlwind. He was exhausted by his celebrity—"I don't want to be a clown anymore, I don't want to be a rock & roll star," he complained to *ROLLING STONE* in 1969—and frustrated with the pressure from Jeffrey to stay on the road making the fast, big money. Hendrix spent much of 1968 as well as the spring of '69 touring North America.

At Electric Lady, Hendrix—who had been touring nonstop since the mid-Sixties, when he was a sideman for R&B stars like Little Richard and the Isley Brothers—finally had a place of his own, where he could live with his music without interference. "That was the dream," says veteran studio architect John Storky, who was only 22 when Hendrix commissioned him to design Electric Lady. "As an artist, this became your home."

Hendrix held his first formal recording session in Studio A on June 15th, 1970, two months before the opening party. The site was in disarray: a second studio was still being built at the end of the hall. But Hendrix got right to work with his current trio: Mitchell and bassist Billy Cox, a trusted old friend from Hendrix's early-Sixties spell in the Army. They played a new instrumental, "All Gods Children." Then Hendrix cut guitar overdubs for the turbulent rocker "Easy Rider" and jammed with a studio guest, Traffic's Steve Winwood, on one of Hendrix's favorite recent originals, "Valleys of Neptune." That number, in a different incarnation, is now the centerpiece of an album of previously unreleased Hendrix studio recordings, also called *Valleys of Neptune*.

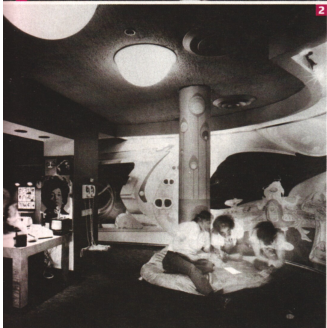
For the next several weeks, Hendrix concentrated on finishing the year's worth of songs and endless tapes he had accumulated for his long-overdue fourth studio album. "We had two closets full of Jimi Hendrix tapes, floor to ceiling, with all of the jams and stuff we had done," says Kramer, who had been Hendrix's steady engineer since *Are You Experienced*. "He would say, 'Pull that take over there.' Or 'Go to this section, yeah, stop. That's what we need.'" Sessions at Electric Lady started at about 8 p.m. and ran long into the next day. Hendrix was so keen to spend every waking minute at Electric Lady that he would show up ahead of schedule.

"That was a huge change I saw in him," Kramer notes. "In the past, we would call for sessions at the Record Plant for seven, and he wouldn't come until midnight, because he was jamming somewhere. At Electric Lady, we'd call a session for seven, and he was often there early. And if he saw a lady standing in the control room, he would get her a chair. The guy was so polite—and proud of the place."

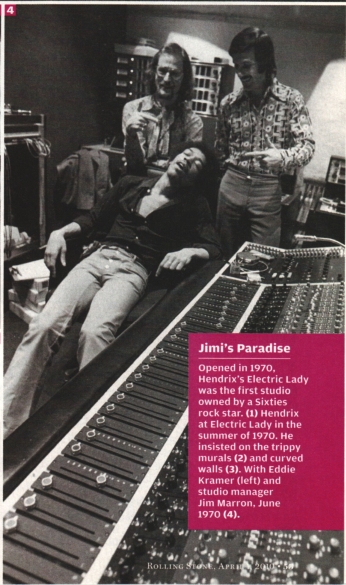
Senior writer DAVID FRICKE profiled Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck in RS 1099.



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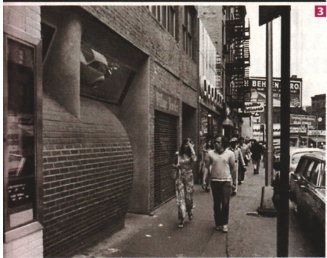


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Jimi's Paradise

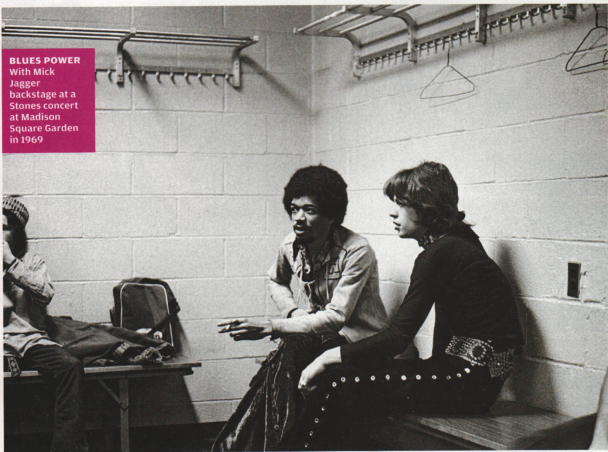
Opened in 1970, Hendrix's Electric Lady was the first studio owned by a Sixties rock star. (1) Hendrix at Electric Lady in the summer of 1970. He insisted on the trippy murals (2) and curved walls (3). With Eddie Kramer (left) and studio manager Jim Marron (right) 1970 (4).



3

BLUES POWER

With Mick Jagger backstage at a Stones concert at Madison Square Garden in 1969



But Hendrix did not enjoy himself at the opening party. Publicist Jane Friedman, whose company represented the guitarist in America, found him at one point sitting alone on the staircase. "I thought, 'Is he exhausted?'" she says. "I walked up to him and said, 'What's the matter?'" He admitted he wasn't very happy. "Hendrix had good reasons. He was then in a volatile relationship with one of his girlfriends, Devon Wilson – the inspiration for the bloodthirsty vamp in the galloping rocker "Dolly Dagger." And Hendrix was flying to London the next day. The last straw was a food fight started by some guests in his pristine new studio. He split in disgust.

But Hendrix talked with another guest before he left: Patti Smith, then a 23-year-old unknown singer-poet managed by Friedman. Smith was sitting on the stairs, where Hendrix joined her. "I was too nervous to go into the party," she recalls. "He said, 'What are you doing? Not going in?' We talked about the studio. He just loved it. He was so excited by it. Listening to him talk was beautiful in every way."

Hendrix never saw Electric Lady again. After playing concerts in Britain, Scandinavia and Germany, including an epic, intermittently brilliant show for 600,000

people on the Isle of Wight, Hendrix – unhappy with the shows and concerned for Cox, who was ill – canceled the remaining dates. He died in London, in his sleep, on September 18th. The official cause of death was "inhalation of vomit due to barbiturate intoxication." Hendrix was an avid fan of LSD and pot and had used heroin (but never succumbed to full-blown addiction). This time, he took an overpowering dose of a sedative, Vesperax.

"WITH THE MUSIC WE WILL PAINT PICTURES OF EARTH AND SPACE, SO THAT THE LISTENER CAN BE TAKEN SOMEWHERE."

Forty years later, Electric Lady is still open for business, at the same location. The outdoor-belly facade is gone; the "electric lady" mural, painted by Lance Jost, is now on the curved wall of Studio A. Led Zeppelin, Stevie Wonder and David Bowie worked on major records there in the Seventies. More recent clients include the Black Crowes and Ryan Adams.

And Smith has gone back often to record; she made her 1975 debut LP, *Horses*, there. "Every time I go in, I can look at the stair we sat on," she says. "That's why I love to record there. It has his spirit."

IN ONE OF HIS FINAL INTERVIEWS, a couple of days before his Isle of Wight appearance, Hendrix told Britain's *Melody Maker* that he had nothing but the future on his mind. "I want a big band," he declared. "I don't mean three harps and 14 violins. I want a big band full of competent musicians that I can conduct and write for. And with the music we will paint pictures of Earth and space, so that the listener can be taken somewhere."

Hendrix also said he'd been "thinking that this era of music – sparked off by the Beatles – had come to an end. Something new has got to come, and Jimi Hendrix will be there."

He didn't make it. But Hendrix left behind a wealth of music that continues to astonish; pivotal and exciting, previously unheard recordings are still being unearthed four decades later. Hendrix's melodic, often elegant wrangling of feedback and distortion and his spiritual ambitions as a composer and producer – to make a music for new-world travel, fusing the sex and lament of electric blues with the spatial theater of the latest recording technology – were genuinely psychedelically yet remain vividly modern. "He was bigger than LSD," the Who's guitarist Pete Townshend wrote about Hendrix in this magazine in 2003. "What he played was fucking loud but also incredibly lyrical and expert. He managed to build this bridge between true blues guitar... and modern sounds" – what Townshend described as "the wall of screaming guitar sound that U2 popularized."

Hendrix's three '67-'68 albums all went Top Five in America – *Electric Ladyland* was Number One – and he still sells records like a living superstar. Since his death, there have been more than 50 official posthumous albums, including rarities collections, concert releases and greatest-hits sets. This year, Experience Hendrix – the company representing Hendrix's estate, founded in 1995 by his late father, Al, and run by Jimi's stepsister Janie – started a new worldwide licensing agreement with Sony Music. The first fruits of a decade-long plan of releases (see accompanying story) are *Valleys of Neptune* and deluxe reissues, with DVDs, of Hendrix's three original studio albums and *First Rays of the New Rising Sun*, the 1997 collection of songs he intended for the unfinished fourth.

The record business has changed dramatically since Experience Hendrix won full control of the guitarist's master recordings, after years of litigation. "Downloading didn't exist, CDs were still coming up," says Janie. "But this is still Jimi's music. He only made four albums but created much more music. Perhaps it wasn't quite ready to release. But we have it."

And Hendrix was in total charge of that music when he made it. *Valleys of Neptune* does not have anything from his months at Electric Lady. Instead, the 12 tracks run the gamut from the acid-garage *Axsis* outtake "Mr. Bad Luck" to the dynamic title track – a composite of Hendrix's vocal from a '69 session and a feral instrumental track from May 1970 – and a surging guitar-chord instrumental, "Lullaby for the Summer," which Hendrix ultimately reworked into "Ezy Ryder."

But the rich pickings reflect the same consuming drive to innovate and succeed that dominated the last year of his life. From August 1969 until September 1970, Hendrix played some of the most important and memorable shows of his career: the closing set at Woodstock, with his classic immolation of "The Star-

UNHEARD HENDRIX

Exciting finds in the Jimi vaults: Lost concerts, epic jams, documentary footage

JIMI HENDRIX DIED WITHOUT a will, causing years of legal turmoil over management of his estate. Now, four decades after his death, much of the rare, exciting music still sitting in the vaults is finally seeing an official release.

Among the tracks unearthed: the Band of Gypsies song "Burning Desire," a whirlwind nine minutes that starts with Hendrix's sassy, clucking guitar over a rolling bass line, then swerves into a hard-funk charge. Hendrix, Billy Cox and Buddy Miles bolt into punklike double time and drop down to a churning blues, with Hendrix massaging his chords with glistering tremolo-bar flourishes.



MIDNIGHT LIGHTNING Hendrix at London's Royal Albert Hall in 1969

"Burning Desire," recorded at the Record Plant in New York on January 16th, 1970, has never been issued. That also goes for a killer instrumental take of "Castles Made of Sand," a 1967 run-through with just Hendrix and Experience drummer Mitch Mitchell, and an alternate master of the *Are You Experienced* ballad "May This Be Love," with different vocals and lead guitar, that Hendrix nearly picked for the final album.

All three tracks will finally be released in the next year by Experience Hendrix, through its new deal with

Sony Music, in a multidisc anthology of rare and unheard music from the guitarist's early sideman recordings to some of his very last sessions.

Like the mid-Nineties Beatles *Anthology* CDs, the Hendrix set "will feature unreleased or commercially unavailable music, pulling it together in a cohesive way," says Hendrix biographer John McDermott, who is the director of catalog development for Experience Hendrix. "You get to hear 'My Diary' [a 1964 single made with Rosa Lee Brooks] to 'Black Gold' and some of the demos Jimi was working on before his death." Experience Hendrix is also preparing a "definitive documentary," directed by Bob Smeaton, who did the Beatles *Anthology* video history.

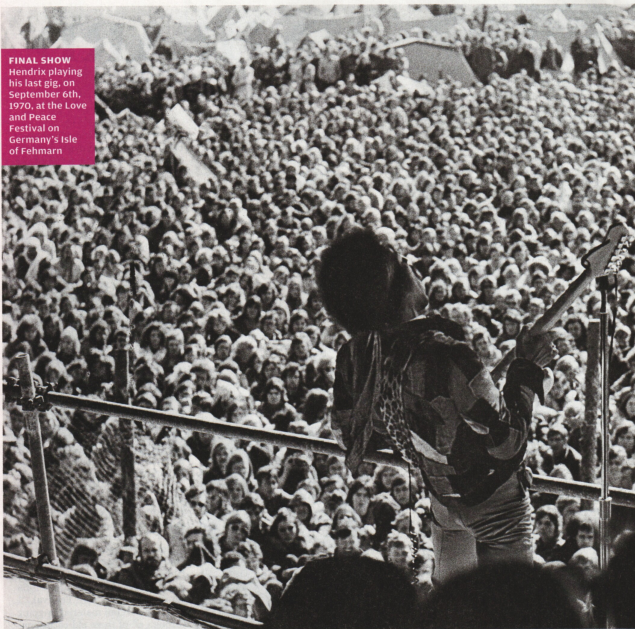
Unlike many artists at the time, Hendrix always owned his song publishing and master recordings. "The music informs the decisions," says McDermott of the rarities and live sets he co-produces with Eddie Kramer and Janie Hendrix. "We ask, 'What's there? Is it up to the quality people expect? Because Jimi was such an improvisational guy, a live recording from Winterland is different from Woodstock and Isle of Wight. They all have value.'"

Future releases in the works include the February 1969 shows filmed and recorded at London's Royal Albert Hall, and a May 1968 set at the Miami Pop Festival. "I found the Miami material by going through all of these old correspondences," says McDermott. "I found the widow of the guy who had all the stuff. And it's brilliant." He would also like to do a "proper presentation" of the Experience's February 1968 stand at Winterland in San Francisco.

There are tapes that still elude McDermott, recordings "presented to Warner Bros. after Jimi's death but that they didn't know what to do with." He cites a video recording of a June 5th, 1970, show in Dallas. "Jimi was always inspired when he played in Texas. The video was offered to Warner Bros., but they passed. It's out there somewhere, people." And if you know where, "please call Experience Hendrix."

D.F.

FINAL SHOW
Hendrix playing his last gig, on September 6th, 1970, at the Love and Peace Festival on Germany's Isle of Fehmarn



Spangled Banner"; the New Year's concerts at the Fillmore East with Cox and drummer Buddy Miles as Band of Gypsies; 1970 gigs with Cox and Mitchell at Berkeley and the Atlanta International Pop Festival. And there would be more than 70 documented recording sessions, two dozen of them at Electric Lady alone.

"Multitasking was a way of life for him," says Cox. "It wasn't a strain. He had a lot of things going on. But he knew where he wanted to go, how he wanted to get there." Cox remembers getting up one morning at the house in upstate New York where he was rehearsing with Hendrix for Woodstock: "We had amps set out on the patio. I was fiddling around, tuning up, and played 'Big Ben' [the famous melody of the chimes at the Houses of Parliament] right below

Jimi's window. He stuck his head out — 'Keep playing that, don't stop!' He came down in his drawers, picked up his guitar and played this answering riff." Hendrix soon developed that into the opening sequence of "Dolly Dagger."

Hendrix joked about his work ethic to TV talk-show host Dick Cavett. "Do you consider yourself a disciplined guy?" Cavett asked in a July 1969 interview. "Do you get up every day and work?"

"I try to get up every day," Hendrix cracked. But he also spoke plainly of his determination. "I don't live on compliments. Matter of fact, it has a way of distracting me. A whole lotta musicians out there — they hear these compliments, and they think, 'Wow, it must have been really great.' So they get fat and satisfied and

lost, and they forget about the actual talent that they have, and they start living in another world."

Tommy Erdelyi saw Hendrix's resolve in close-up. Erdelyi is better known as Tommy Ramone; he co-founded the Ramones in 1974 and was their original drummer. But in late 1969 and early 1970, he was an assistant engineer at the Record Plant in New York and worked on Hendrix's sessions there with Band of Gypsies. Songs recorded at those dates included early versions of the 1970 single "Izabella" and the guitar-firefight epic "Machine Gun."

"He wasn't verbal, but he didn't have any trouble explaining what he wanted," Erdelyi says of Hendrix. "He would do take after take, then want the gear



moved around if he wasn't getting the right sound." Erdelyi recalls performances of songs like "Machine Gun" in which Hendrix's guitar, blowing at top volume through three stacks of Marshall speaker cabinets, shook the control-room window. "He could get incredible sustain, this deep tone, almost like a cello. It was beautiful stuff."

But Hendrix also "seemed insecure," Erdelyi adds. He was with Hendrix at the Record Plant one day while guitarist Leslie West recorded with his band Mountain in another room. "Jimi asked me, 'Do you think Leslie West is better than me?' I thought he was kidding." Erdelyi pauses, still shocked by the question. "Then I realized that he was serious.

"It also made me realize why he was a perfectionist," Erdelyi continues. "To me, Jimi Hendrix was a rock god. He didn't think of himself that way. He was competing with other musicians. He came to those sessions in a very serious way, to make the best records he possibly could."

IT WAS DESTINY — WE JAMMED, and it sounded good," says Cox, reflecting on the first time he played with Hendrix, in November 1961, in a serviceman's club on the Army base in Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Hendrix was a paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division. "But Jimi would come right over after he had formation with his company," says Cox. "We would rehearse all day long, every day, working on patterns and riffs." Years later, when Cox first heard Hendrix's records with the Experience, he recognized some of those licks, which ended up in "Foxey Lady" and "Purple Haze." Cox, 68, is performing his friend's songs through March, along with guitarists such as Joe Satriani, Jonny Lang and Vernon Reid, on the 2010 Experience Hendrix tribute tour.

Hendrix and Cox had a similar routine in 1970, before sessions at Electric Lady. "Jimi would come to my apartment," Cox says. "We'd turn on a small amp and work on music. I'd add something. He'd add something. We'd sit and laugh and have some strawberry upside-down cake, watch television. Then we'd go back to the song.

"We didn't fish, we didn't hunt, we didn't play tennis or golf," Cox goes on. "Music

who had his first meeting with Hendrix, Kramer and Jeffrey about the project in January 1969. Storyk soon got a call telling him the club was scrapped. Hendrix wanted a "full-on recording studio."

Storyk describes Hendrix as "polite, extremely quiet and very attentive. He was very organized as to how he wanted the place to look and feel. He didn't want any straight lines. He wanted curves. He wanted it to feel like a living room. It was for his comfort." During construction, Storyk saw little of Hendrix. But the guitarist stopped by at night, after the workers had gone home, to see how things were going.

"I remember one visit," Storyk says. "We had all the doors installed" — custom-soundproofed doors with small square windows. "Jimi said, 'Can we make these windows round?' Fifteen expensive doors came off, and four weeks later, there were new ones with round windows. We changed them, because that's what he wanted." But the remarkable front of Electric Lady was Storyk's idea, inspired by Kiesler's long, rounded design for the Shrine of the Book, the Jerusalem museum that houses the Dead Sea Scrolls. "Jimi never even saw the drawings. It just went up."

Building delays and unexpected problems — at one point the site was flooded by water from an underground river — forced Hendrix to take out a \$300,000 loan from his label, Warner Bros. Hendrix also did long-weekend tours to help pay the mounting construction bills. At the same time, he was recording at other New York studios, spending more money and getting little done. "He would call me up in a panic

"JIMI DIDN'T SEE HIMSELF AS A ROCK GOD," SAYS RAMONE. "HE ONCE ASKED IF HE WAS BETTER THAN LESLIE WEST."

was the priority. If you love something greater than you love yourself, it overcomes everything." Asked if Hendrix loved music so much that he left no time for rest or peace — Cox quotes Hendrix's lyrics in "Manic Depression," from *Are You Experienced*. "Music, sweet music, I wish I could caress, caress."

Music, Cox says, "was his peace."

Hendrix originally envisioned the basement space on 8th Street — the site of the famous Film Guild Cinema, built in 1929 and designed by the avant-garde architect Frederick Kiesler — as a different kind of playground. "He jammed at the club there, Generation, a lot," says Kramer. "He wanted a nightclub, a place to hang and jam."

"In the club would be a booth where he could record things live," says John Storyk,

in the middle of the night," says Kramer, who was director of engineering at Electric Lady and busy taking care of its technical needs. "He'd say, 'Man, can you come down to the Record Plant? It's not happening.' I would jump in a cab and get him situated." Days later, Kramer would get a similar call from the Hit Factory.

Somehow, in the middle of that tumult, in March 1970, Hendrix made a quick trip to London, where he played on sessions for two American friends in town: Stephen Stills and Love's Arthur Lee. "He was in a swirl," says Stills, who was living in England at the time and making his first solo album, *Stephen Stills*. "But that day in London we had was very peaceful." At Island Studios, Hendrix played a fluid, unusually tempered solo on [Cont. on 86]

JIMI HENDRIX

[Cont. from 57] Stills' song "Old Times Good Times."

"We also sang some old bluesy songs together," Stills goes on. "We sounded nice together. Then we went clubbing, thinking we were going to come back. He drifted off with a female companion," Stills notes, laughing. Two days later, Hendrix was at Olympic Studios with Lee, soloing on a song, "The Everlasting First," that appeared on Love's *False Start*, shortly after Hendrix's death.

Rock bottom, for Hendrix, came on January 28th, 1970, in a disastrous appearance with Band of Gypsys at Madison Square Garden. They went on at 3 a.m., stumbled through two songs and left. Hendrix immediately broke up the group.

"He was in a bad mood when Buddy and I walked into the dressing room," Cox says. According to some accounts, Hendrix took too much acid or got spiked by someone else. Cox's version: "Michael Jeffrey was sitting next to him, and they had some confrontation prior to us arriving." A week later, Hendrix, Mitchell and Redding were interviewed for a ROLLING STONE story announcing the reunion of the Experience. They broke up again before the issue was printed.

It was easy to see why, in the story as it appeared in March 1970: Hendrix sounded desperate, even defeated. "Most of the time I can't get it on the guitar, you know?" he said about songwriting. "Most of the time I'm just laying around daydreaming and hearing all this music. . . . If you go to the guitar and try to play it, it spoils the whole thing. . . . I just can't play the guitar that well, to get all this music together."

But he was a reborn man that summer at Electric Lady. "He was thrilled to have a place where his gear was set up, ready to go when he walked in," says Kramer. At the console, "Jimi always had a large legal pad with him. He would sketch things out, where they were supposed to go." In Studio A, with Cox and Mitchell, "if we hit a brick wall, Jimi would already have another song in mind. He would start playing the riff, and Billy and Mitch would be right with him, knowing where he was going."

On August 14th, 1970, at Electric Lady, Hendrix wrote a memo headlined "Songs for the LP Straight Ahead" – one of a couple of provisional titles for his next album – and listed 24 songs, including "Ezy Ryder," the racing identity crisis "Room Full of Mirrors," the waterfall-guitar ballad "Angel" and a version of "Valleys of Neptune." At one point, he made another list; the double LP became a triple album, *People, Hell and Angels*.

On August 22nd, Hendrix and Kramer prepared a different running order – a double album again – with the survivor's blues "In From the Storm" and the new-morning hymn "Hey Baby (New Rising Sun)." Hendrix also recorded a new song, "Belly Button Window," a playful boogie with vocal, guitar and overdubbed wah-wah. It was the last song he ever recorded, inspired by the baby growing inside Mitchell's pregnant wife, Lynn.

In London for that last European tour, Hendrix talked about his latest music, in the *Melody Maker* interview, like it was ready for the world, with an assurance that the world would be different afterward: "The term 'blowing someone's mind' is valid. . . . But we are going to give them something that will blow their mind, and while it's blown, there will be something to fill the gap. It's going to be a complete form of music."

Hendrix was back in London after the European shows when he called Kramer in New York. "We had mixed four songs for the new record," Kramer says. "The album was almost complete. He wanted me to bring the tapes to London. I said, 'We're in the middle of stuff here. We've just built this studio.' He said, 'Yeah, I know. Don't worry about it. I'll see you in a week.'"

"That was the last thing I heard from him."