

Days of Future  
Passed — the Moody  
Blues in 1968:  
Mike Pinder,  
John Lodge,  
Graeme Edge,  
Justin Hayward,  
and Ray Thomas  
(from left)





# THE MOODY BLUES

AVATARS AND COPILOTS OF WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED ROCK'S ENLIGHTENMENT, THE INNOVATIVE BAND INFUSED ITS SOUND WITH SYMPHONIC GRANDEUR AND EXPERIMENTAL REACH.

BY PARKE PUTERBAUGH



**“**Isn't Life Strange?” That is one of many simple yet provocative questions posed by various Moody Blues songs. With unabashed earnestness, betraying their roots in 1960s youth culture, this British quintet pondered the riddles of existence with thought-provoking lyrics and bracing, adventurous music. They became one of the world's most popular, beloved, and enduring bands. Their vast body of songs offered a counterpoint of hopefulness and idealism to the darker currents of a warring and polluted planet. Few artists of their stature devoted themselves so assiduously to shining the light of love on a fraught, despairing world. But they also set rock on a boldly progressive course, infusing it with symphonic grandeur and experimental reach. And they sold 70 million albums worldwide and helped usher in the album-rock era.

Their musical foundation largely resided in Mike Pinder's groundbreaking use of the Mellotron, an electric keyboard that sounded like an orchestra's string section, and Ray Thomas' flute playing. The latter was unique in rock, predating the arrival of Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson, and adding an element of jazzy im-



pressionism to the band. (Sadly, Thomas died on January 4 from prostate cancer.) Guitarist Justin Hayward, bassist John Lodge, and drummer Graeme Edge provided conventional rock instrumentation but with forward-thinking spirit. The Moody Blues, as they've often noted, saw themselves as a single entity driven by a shared pursuit of the Muse. They coalesced around this commitment to artistic unity one night in 1967, as they discussed musical direction while en route to London.

"We agreed then, and shook hands on it, that we would just play what we wanted to play, make music for ourselves, and trust our own judgment," Hayward recalled. "We've done that ever since. We haven't been influenced by fashion or trends, and because of that we've seen a lot of other things come and go — and we're still here."

The Moody Blues formed in Birmingham, England, in the spring of 1964, with Pinder, Thomas, Edge, vocalist-guitarist Denny Laine, and bassist Clint Warwick. Like many British musicians of that time, they cut their teeth on home-grown skiffle and American blues and rockabilly, adopting a beat-driven, rhythm & blues approach. They were signed to Decca Records after performing at London's Marquee nightclub. Their debut single flopped, but their second effort, a lively cover of American soul singer Bessie Banks' "Go Now," topped the British charts in January 1965. Driven by Laine's charged vocal and Pinder's pumping piano, the song reached Number Ten in the U.S. that April.

As British Invasion stars, the band shared stages with the likes of the Kinks and appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. In the U.K., they opened for the Beatles on their final tour, and backed Chess Records blues legends Sonny Boy Williamson and Little Walter. But lacking further hits on the scale of "Go Now," the original lineup fractured. Warwick (who dropped out of music) and Laine (later in Paul McCartney's Wings) left in 1966. An interim bassist, Rod Clark, was soon replaced by Lodge, who'd played with Pinder and Thomas in the neo-rockabilly El Riot and the Rebels. Hayward had applied to join the revamped Animals, but the vacancy was already filled. So Eric Burdon passed the letter to Mike Pinder. The rest is history.

Pinder, Thomas, Edge, Lodge, and Hayward formed the definitive Moody Blues lineup, releasing seven albums from 1967 to 1972 that established them as brilliant, innovative, cosmic rockers. They were one of the first touring bands to fill arenas during rock's sudden growth spurt. With their ruminative, existential lyrics and accessibly progressive music, they were harbingers of a new age in rock.

Both Hayward and Lodge were strong singers, songwriters, and instrumentalists. Though their first two sin-

**THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT** Denny Laine (left) and Clint Warwick, 1965; the original lineup in 1964: Thomas, Warwick, Pinder, Laine (from left), and Edge (hidden). **OPPOSITE PAGE** Hanging out in Brighton, 1967.



gles failed to set the charts on fire, they had promising approaches. Hayward's bright, upbeat "Fly Me High" introduced a key, recurring theme of transcendence. Pinder's "Love and Beauty" spoke of aspirational idealism and debuted the Mellotron, whose dense, gauzy textures became a hallmark of the band's sound.

Nearly three years had passed since "Go Now" when they put out *Days of Future Passed* in November 1967. The album changed everything, including rock music itself. As luck would have it, their label, Deram Records, was scheming for a way to sell listeners on the dynamism of stereo recordings cut with their "Deramic Sound System." They wanted a rock group and symphony orchestra to collaborate on the popular classical chestnut, Antonin Dvorak's *New World Symphony*. The Moody Blues agreed to do it, along with producer Tony Clarke (the "sixth Moody Blue") and arranger-conductor Peter Knight. But instead, they conspired with Clarke and Knight to record a suite of original songs about a day in the life of an average person. The songs were accompanied and linked by Knight's evocative orchestrations, recorded by an ad hoc assemblage of freelance musicians dubbed the London Festival Orchestra. With the band recording in





**THIS PAGE** On *Top of the Pops*, 1971: Pinder, Thomas, Hayward, and Lodge (from left).  
**OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP** Hayward and Lodge announce their Blue Jays project, 1975; a gold disc tally in 1978; Hayward in 1967.



one studio and Knight and the orchestra in another, the project was done in just three weeks. Hewing to the theme of an evolving day, the album offered a shifting tableau of styles and moods: ornate psychedelia (Thomas' "Twilight Time"); Indian-inflected (Pinder's "The Sun Set"); soaring, harmonic rock (Lodge's "Time to Get Away"); and solemn, elegiac balladry (Hayward's "Nights in White Satin").

As the first rock band to collaborate on a full album with an orchestra, they had an unfolding, sustained impact on the charts, entering *Billboard* in May 1968 and racking up 103 weeks there over the next five years. In fact, the album didn't peak until 1972, when it reached Number Three in tandem with the belated success of "Nights in White Satin," which hit Number Two. The song was re-released twice more in the U.K., surpassing its original peak in 1972 (Number Nine) and 1979 (Number Fourteen). Isn't life strange, indeed.

Freed of the expectations and constraints over what a rock band ought to sound like, the band reinvented themselves as a self-contained rock orchestra with quasi-classical elements, realizing a half-dozen wildly ambitious albums, from *In Search of the Lost Chord* (1968) through *Seventh Sojourn* (1972). This remarkable body of work found them developing and refining a visionary group aesthetic that endeavored to knit words and music into a song-serving whole. *Lost Chord* offered such classics as Lodge's buoyant "Ride My See-Saw" and Thomas'

wryly psychedelic “Legend of a Mind.” In “The Best Way to Travel,” Mike Pinder offered an intriguing bit of wisdom: “The best way to travel is with your mind.”

Unlike many progressive rock groups of the 1970s, the Moody Blues eschewed extended improvisations and flashy solos, focusing on thoughtful compositions, detailed arrangements, and precise execution. Their recording sessions, with producer Clarke serving as a sounding board and collaborator, were marathon efforts of experimentation and assembly. “We start by sitting around together, talking, trying to paint a picture of what the song’s about,” Lodge said in 1972. “It’s only from the discussions we find the direction.”

Moody Blues songs often feature discreet but interlocking parts and sections. Hayward’s hit, “Questions,” from *A Question of Balance* (1970), was built from two different pieces: a slower, more personal love song, bookended by the raging tempo and blistering strumming of its agitated companion. On each album, the songs cross-fade and segue to create a sustained trip for listeners. This is especially true of *On the Threshold of a Dream* and *To Our Children’s Chil-*

*dren’s Children*, on which the Moody Blues’ role as studio sorcerers reached its zenith. *Children* opens with Edge’s exhilarating “Higher and Higher,” and was the first release on the group’s custom label, Threshold Records.

Finding it difficult to perform the intricate, overdubbed parts and elaborate instrumentation of their recorded works onstage, they vowed to make subsequent albums more reproducible in concert. This brought greater immediacy to their work, but not at the expense of their compositional acumen, lyric content, or receptive and still-growing audiences. In 1971, *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* yielded Hayward’s “The Story in Your Eyes,” featuring a hot, fuzz-toned guitar solo. The following year saw *Seventh Sojourn*, with Lodge’s barreling, anthemic “I’m Just a Singer (In a Rock and Roll Band”).

After *Sojourn* ran its course, the band finally took a long hiatus and worked on solo or duo projects, the most successful being Hayward and Lodge’s Blue Jays. They reunited in 1978 to cut their eighth album, *Octave*, but all was not well in every corner of their world. Weary of touring, Mike Pinder left the band. Producer Clarke bowed out as well. *Octave* was welcomed by faithful fans, but the real third-stage resurgence of the phoenix that is the Moody Blues came in 1981, with *Long Distance Voyager*. Keyboardist Patrick Moraz, briefly in Yes, filled in for Pinder, his synthesizers bringing a bouncier feel to the reenergized, somewhat poppier music. The Lodge-penned hit “Gemini Dream” could’ve passed for one of the disco-era pop-prog hits by fellow Birmingham natives ELO. The 1980s saw further sturdy, deserving work from the band, including

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



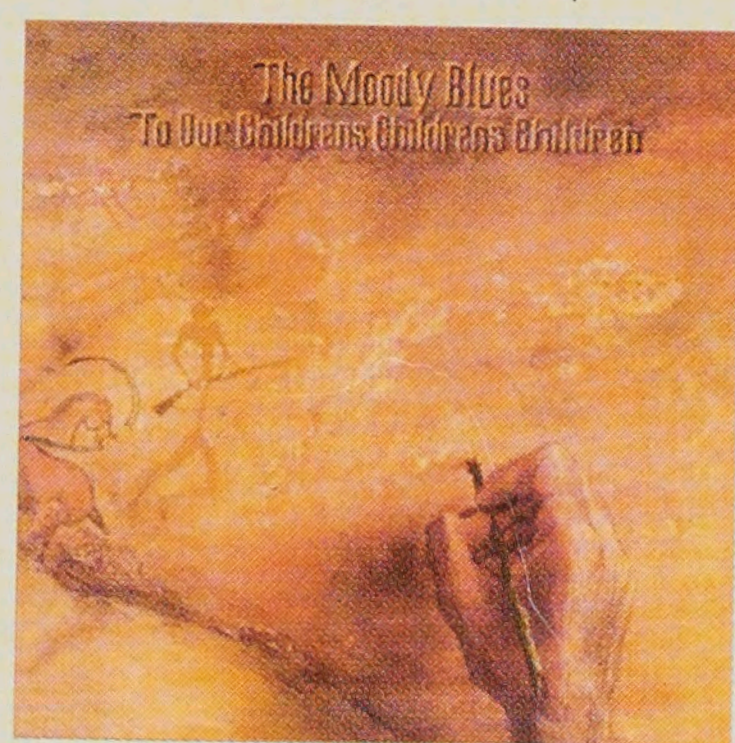
**Days of Future Passed**  
1967 (Deram)



**In Search of the Lost Chord**  
1968 (Deram)



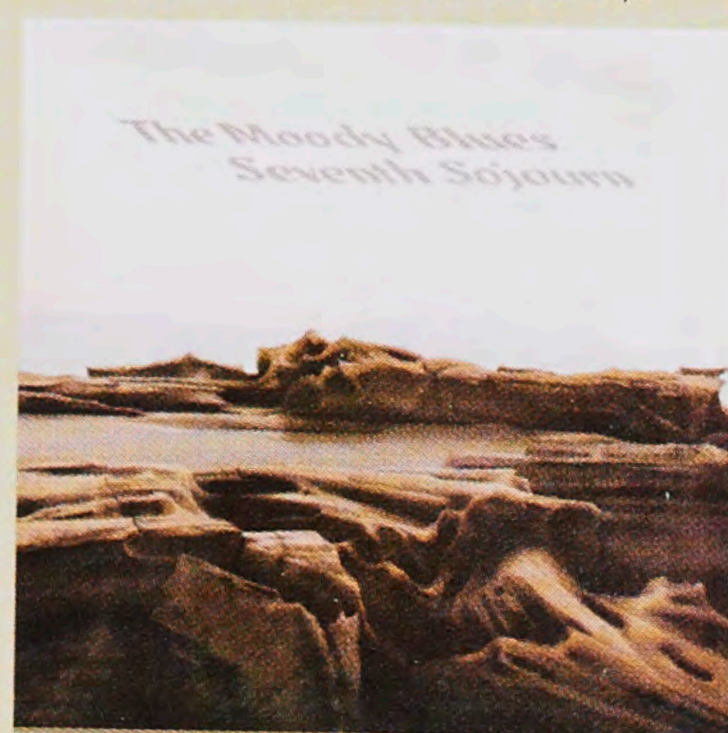
**On the Threshold of a Dream**  
1969 (Deram)



**To Our Children's Children's Children**  
1969 (Threshold)



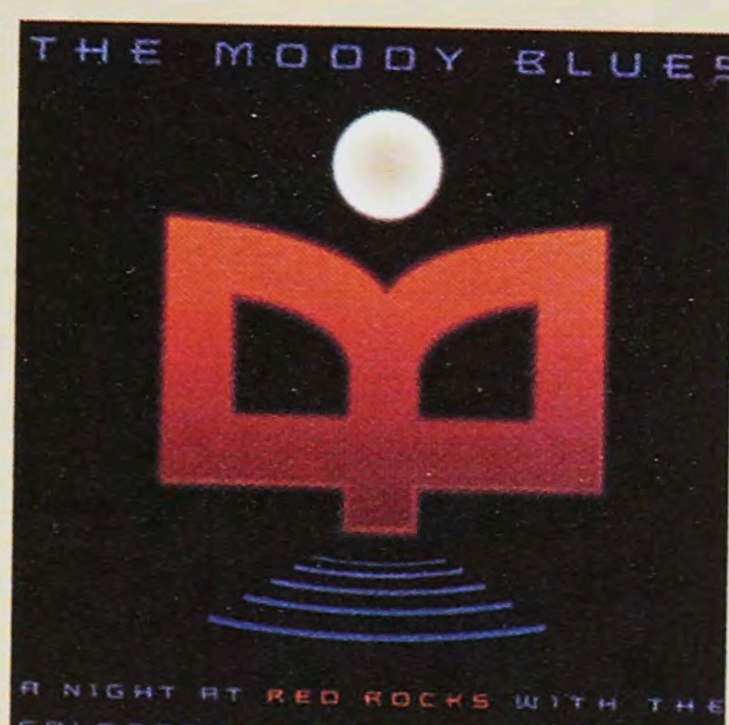
**Every Good Boy Deserves Favour**  
1971 (Threshold)



**Seventh Sojourn**  
1972 (Threshold)



**Long Distance Voyager**  
1981 (Threshold)



**A Night at Red Rocks With the Colorado Symphony Orchestra**  
1993 (Polydor)

“WE’VE SEEN  
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*The Present* (1983), *The Other Side of Life* (1986), and *Sur La Mer* (1988). *Other Side* gave the band another commercial boost, along with a younger, MTV-era audience, when Hayward’s “Your Wildest Dreams” became a Top Ten hit.

The fourth chapter in the Moody Blues’ quixotic career came in 1992, when they performed in concert with an orchestra — the Colorado Symphony — for the first time, circling back to the classical-rock fusion of *Days of Future Passed*. The occasion was the album’s twenty-fifth anniversary, and it provided an appealing new way to approach their back catalog. “The whole project is something that we had to get out of our system,” Hayward said at the time. “It was such a heady experience that now we want to do it again and again.”

Twenty-five years after that landmark concert, they are doing just that. Like the peripatetic journeys their albums have taken listeners on over the decades, the Moody Blues have at last found their way into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. As true British gentlemen, they’ve been gracious about acknowledging the overdue honor. As Hayward told *Rolling Stone*, “I’m extremely grateful to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame for two things: For creating the supreme temple to something that has brought me endless joy, [and] that after all these years they are inducting us.”



Then there were three: The Moody Blues in 2015.