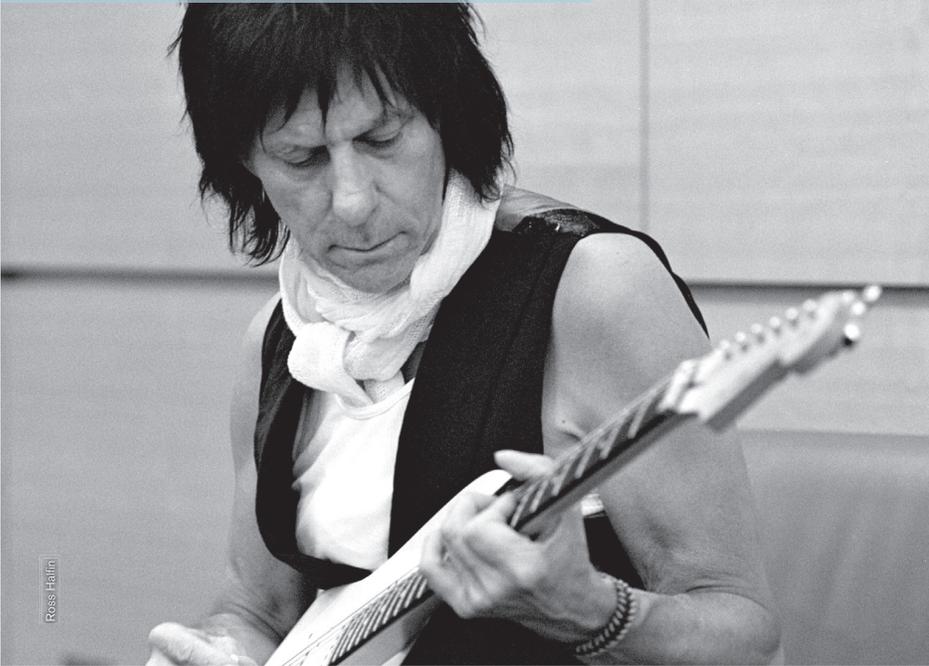
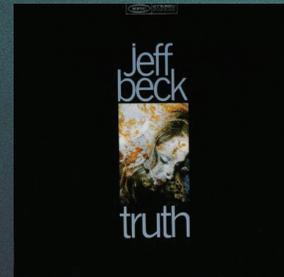


BEHIND THE CLASSICS



Reiss Haim

WRITTEN BY: JIMMY PAGE
 RECORDED: MAY 16-17, 1966,
 IBC RECORDING STUDIOS, LONDON
 PRODUCED BY: MICKIE MOST
 GUITAR: JEFF BECK, JIMMY PAGE
 BASS: JOHN PAUL JONES
 PIANO: NICKY HOPKINS
 DRUMS: KEITH MOON
 FROM THE ALBUM: TRUTH (1968)



“Beck’s Bolero”

JEFF BECK

WHEN BUDDING GUITAR HERO ERIC Clapton left the Yardbirds in the spring of 1965, the group approached local London session ace Jimmy Page to replace him. Page instead recommended his friend Jeff Beck, a 20-year-old six-string slinger known for his dexterity and flair for exotic scales. But just a little over a year after Beck joined the Yardbirds, he was feeling artistically antsy—so manager Simon Napier-Bell suggested he try laying down some solo material. Beck set his sights on his favorite drummer, Keith Moon of the Who. “I didn’t really like the Who then,” Beck later quipped. “They were annoying me because they had my drummer.” He didn’t expect Moon to be available, but as it happened the drummer was feeling disenchanted with his own band and said yes.

With studio time booked for a few days later, Beck headed to Page’s house in search of song ideas. As they talked, Page sat on the arm of a chair with his 12-string Fender electric guitar and strummed a chord sequence reminiscent of Maurice Ravel’s 1928 orchestral piece *Boléro*. “He hit these Amaj7 chords and the Fm7 chords, and I just started playing over the top of it,” Beck recalled. “We agreed that

we would go in and get Moonie to play a bolero rhythm with it.” The two recruited studio pianist Nicky Hopkins and Who bass player John Entwistle to join them.

Moon didn’t want Who leader Pete Townshend to know what he was up to, so he arrived at London’s IBC Recording Studios disguised in sunglasses and a Russian Cossack hat. Entwistle pulled out of the session at the last minute, so Page recruited bass player John Paul Jones to take his place. Beck and Page began running the assembled group through the song. “We didn’t have to play it more than twice before the others were onto it,” Beck marveled. “There was not an ounce of work in it. We didn’t deliberate, we just played it through!” The band laid down several takes, each time letting the bolero pattern build for the song’s simmering first minute and a half before breaking into a rock ‘n’ roll gallop—the rhythmic shift announced by a drum fill and audible scream from Moon, who at that moment accidentally destroyed an expensive microphone. “He hit the mic and smashed it off,” Beck said, “so all you can hear from then on is cymbals.” Beck played the soaring lead licks on a Les Paul, running through a Vox AC30 amplifier.

When the players heard the completed “Beck’s Bolero,” it seemed obvious they had the makings of an amazing new group. “It just sounded and felt like we shouldn’t go anywhere else,” Beck said. “We should just get rehearsing and carry this band.” Moon joked that the group would go over “like a lead Zeppelin,” and the name stuck. After first considering Steve Winwood, they approached the Small Faces’ Steve Marriott about becoming their lead singer. Page recalled receiving an unambiguous response from Marriott manager Don Arden: “How would you like to play guitar with broken fingers? You will be if you don’t stay away from Stevie.” With no singer, the idea quickly ran out of steam. The Who and the Yardbirds each had tour obligations, and “Beck’s Bolero” was quietly issued a year later as the B-side of the Beck solo single “Hi Ho Silver Lining.” Page eventually replaced Beck in the Yardbirds before assembling his own group—which he called, with Moon’s blessing, Led Zeppelin. Page once mused that the one-off band could have been the first of the great rock supergroups. “Instead, it didn’t happen” he said. “Apart from the ‘Bolero.’ That’s the closest it got.”

—Chris Neal