

The Byrds Encyclopedia Article

The Byrds

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The Byrds

The Byrds began as a folk-rock band in 1965 led by Jim McGuinn (later renamed Roger following his conversion to Subud). The harmonies arranged by David Crosby and McGuinn's electric twelve-string guitar gave them a rich, fresh sound. Often described as the American Beatles, The Byrds were nevertheless distinctly original. On their first two albums, *Mr. Tambourine Man* and *Turn! Turn! Turn!* (1965), they covered Bob Dylan and traditional folk songs, and wrote their own material. On "Eight Miles High" (1966) McGuinn exhibited the influence of Indian ragas and the improvisational style of John Coltrane. The Byrds explored a psychedelic sound on *Fifth Dimension* (1966) and *Younger than Yesterday* (1967). They continued in the folk/psychedelic style on *The Notorious Byrd Brothers* (1968), but Crosby left halfway through the recording of this album, later forming Crosby, Stills, and Nash. The Byrds' next album, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* (1968), detoured into country-western. Throughout the next five albums, the band suffered numerous personnel changes. McGuinn remained the only original member, but somehow the newcomers persuaded him to continue recording country music and The Byrds abandoned their exploratory spirit. They disbanded in 1973. Today The Byrds are remembered for the classics of their folk and psychedelic period, some of which were immortalized in the film *Easy Rider* (1969).

Further Reading:

Fricke, David. Liner notes for *The Byrds*. New York, Columbia Records, 1990.

Rogan, Johnny. *Timeless Flight: The Definitive Biography of the Byrds*. London, Scorpion Publications, 1981.