

# The Groundhogs

The band was originally formed as The Dollar Bills in New Cross, London in 1962 by brothers Pete and John Cruickshank (born in 1943 and 1945 respectively in Calcutta, West Bengal, India). Tony McPhee (born 1944), the lead guitarist in an instrumental group called the Shcenuals, joined the group later that same year. McPhee steered them towards the blues and renamed them after a John Lee Hooker song, "Groundhog's Blues".

John Cruickshank suggested they became John Lee's Groundhogs when they backed John Lee Hooker on his 1964 UK tour: they later supplemented Little Walter, Jimmy Reed and Champion Jack Dupree when they toured the UK. McPhee featured on Dupree's *From New Orleans to Chicago* (1966) alongside Eric Clapton. The Groundhogs issued "Shake It" b/w "Rock Me" on the Interphon record label in January 1965.

Their line-up on their first album, *Scratchin' the Surface*, released in November 1968, consisted of McPhee as singer and guitarist; bassist Peter Cruickshank (born 2 July 1945,<sup>[1]</sup> in Calcutta), Ken Pustelnik on drums (born 13 March 1946 on a farm near Blairgowrie, Angus, Scotland) and Steve Rye on harmonica (born 8 March 1946 in London – died 19 July 1992, in London). In 1969, the single "B.D.D." (Blind Deaf Dumb) flopped in the UK but hit number one in Lebanon.

The group's album releases *Thank Christ For The Bomb* (May 1970); *Split* (March 1971); and *Who Will Save the World? The Mighty Groundhogs* (March 1972), recorded as a trio without Rye, all reached the Top 10 in the UK Albums Chart. *Split* reached number 5, spending 27 weeks in the UK Albums Chart and achieved gold record status, while a single release from the album, "Cherry Red", was featured on BBC Television's *Top of the Pops* programme on 22 April 1971.

They supported The Rolling Stones on their 1971 British tour at the request of Mick Jagger and released an album of their live set on the Stones tour, recorded at Leeds University and called *Live at Leeds*. All these albums and live shows were performed by the classic power trio of Cruickshank, McPhee and Pustelnik. 1974's album *Solid* saw a last return to the charts.

After breaking up in 1976 they returned with a different line-up a decade later. In 1986 Groundhogs mastermind Tony McPhee found a solid mark 2 line-up with ex-Amon Düül II/Hawkwind/Van-der-Graaf-Generator bass player Dave Anderson and Welsh local hero drummer Mick Jones. This now legendary line-up toured Europe extensively both in the UK and also the continent, especially in Germany. The Groundhogs' original manager Roy Fisher even put together a short-lived 'original line-up' to celebrate their fortieth anniversary. McPhee left that band again leaving Cruickshank and Pustelnik to continue, subsequently forming 'The Groundhogs Rhythm Section' with invited frontmen. Tony McPhee continued to tour with his mark 2 formation to great success in the 80s, 90s and 2000s until he was struck down by three consecutive strokes in 2009.

From 2011 on McPhee had even a mark 3 line-up consisting of McPhee, Anderson, Joanna Deacon (vocals), and Carl Stokes (drums) from the death rock band 'Cancer'. Due to McPhee's ongoing health issues relating to a stroke in 2009, Tony McPhee & The Groundhogs. This new Groundhogs' lineup retired in January 2014 due to McPhee's ill health and not having recovered.

One of Britain's greatest Bluesrock bands is now history. McPhee was idolized by many, a.o. Jimi Hendrix and his close friend Rory Gallagher, as one of the greatest Blues and Rock guitarists ever.