



## Eric Hayes

Photo by: Joshua Hayes

**As a youth, Canadian photographer captured historical images of folk and rock legends.**

**By Mike Sadava**  
**Photos by Eric Hayes**

**A** combination of nerve, luck, and a good eye allowed Eric Hayes and his Nikon camera to witness an important period of music history.

In the late 1960s, Hayes was barely in his twenties, living in England and publishing photos of some of the most influential folk and rock musicians. He shot a cover photo of John Lennon dressed as a wizard for *Rolling Stone*. He photographed the Rolling Stones in the studio during Brian Jones's last session before his death. He

followed and photographed Ravi Shankar on a month-long tour in India, shot George Harrison teaching *She Came In Through the Bathroom Window* to Joe Cocker, a dishevelled Jimi Hendrix being interviewed in his London apartment. And his photos are on two iconic album covers of Fairport Convention.

Half a century later, some of these photos taken during an 18-month period are still turning up in various publications.

Now in his mid-seventies and living in Victoria, Hayes says that period in England was unforgettable in the way that some in the previous generation talk about the war, minus the violence and PTSD.

"A lot happens to people when they're young," Hayes says. "It was a couple of years of such intense activity."

At one point of his youth he wanted to be a musician, but soon realized his talents were elsewhere. "My guitar playing never would have gotten me into the studio with



Bob Dylan and The Band, Isle of Wight, 1969

the Rolling Stones, but my photography did."

He was going to photography school in California when Ravi Shankar was playing the Hollywood Bowl, and his idol George Harrison was going to be there. Hayes tried to get backstage and was ushered out, but managed to stand near the stage and take photos during the concert.

Oddly enough, there were no other photographers there, and he got a tap on the shoulder and a big man with a Liverpool accent said: "Mr. Harrison would like to see you during the break." He was invited to send some prints to Shankar's manager when they were developed.

They must have liked his photos. Months later, Hayes had dropped out of school and was on the way to India with his girlfriend when he got a telegram offering him a job to join a documentary film crew following Shankar around India and do the still photographs.

"I thought I'd be instantly enlightened. Like a lot of people, I saw India as a magic place."

India turned out to be more capitalistic than magical, but the tour went well, and he got to be in hotel rooms and at all-night concerts listening to Shankar and his tabla player, amazed by the polyrhythms of Indian music.

Hayes and his girlfriend stayed in India for months, got married in Mumbai, and with the help of a wedding present bought an old Land Rover and travelled overland to England.

They rented a bedsit near the Brixton prison in London and got into the Swinging Sixties way of life. With a big mop of curly



Jimi Hendrix



Fairport Convention: working on *Liege and Lief*

hair and the dandified English clothes of the era, Hayes started hanging out in clubs like the Marquee and the 100 Club, taking pictures of the bands. More often than not, they'd ask to see prints.

One of the most enduring contacts was with Fairport Convention, who hired him for two of their most iconic albums—*Unhalfbricking* and *Liege and Leaf*. The latter session got him the cover photo on the first British issue of *Rolling Stone*, of Sandy Denny eating breakfast.

"We got along really well. I think it was because I was from Canada, not an American with a big ego."

For *Unhalfbricking*, Sandy Denny suggested shooting the band having afternoon tea in the garden of her parents' grand house in Wimbledon. The cover photo he ended up taking had her parents in the foreground outside the gate with the band behind the lattice fence, but somehow he got each head of a band member framed by a different large square in the fence.

Hayes was also with Fairport during the tragic period after the car crash that killed drummer Martin Lamble and Jeannie Franklyn, the girlfriend of Richard Thompson. He visited Denny in hospital and felt the grief.

"They were in shock, especially Richard Thompson from losing his girlfriend. I think it coloured the rest of his life, all those angry songs."

Eventually, Fairport came back even stronger, adding new drummer Dave Mattacks and Dave Swarbrick, one of the greatest-ever fiddlers in British traditional music.

Their producer, Joe Boyd, rented a house for the band to rehearse in and Hayes spent

two days there, shooting hundreds of candid shots in both black and white and colour slide formats for *Liege and Leaf*.

"It was a most magical experience. You're in this two-century-old country cottage, hearing Dave Swarbrick's fiddle from down below coming up the stairs."

Hayes is still in contact with some of the surviving Fairport members, including Simon Nicol, Thompson, and Boyd.

Hayes's contact with the Stones was pure luck and moxie. He went to their management office on the off chance, and a young manager said they just happened to be in the recording studio and needed some new pictures.

He spent a couple of all-night sessions while they were recording *Let It Bleed*, trying to stay invisible and out of the way.

"I was totally amazed at how hard-working they were. I went there thinking there'd be a haze of pot smoke and alcohol, but they were all business. They went from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. with a supper break at 2 a.m."

The one exception was Brian Jones, who seemed out of it. At one point, he asked Hayes to play an E note on the piano so he could tune his guitar, but was incapable of doing it. He later found out that the engineer had turned off Jones's mic while they were recording. Jones died months later.

Despite the glamour, Hayes and his wife were barely getting by and eventually decided to return to British Columbia. Broke and desperate for work, he got a job at a sawmill in Clearwater.

"I went from being a fashionable man



John Lennon



Mick Jagger

about town to working at a sawmill and living in a tiny log cabin."

But he soon got his photography career back on track, first at small weeklies, eventually moving up to national level publications. He photographed everyone, from lifers in a maximum-security prison to Brian Mulroney to nudists. He shot for publications such as *Maclean's*, *Canadian Geographic*, the *Toronto Star*, *Harrowsmith*, and even ads for Bacardi rum.

But some of his old music photos still occasionally pop up in publications. His Hendrix shots and pictures he took in 1966 of Jimmy Page playing with The Yardbirds have been published in extremely expensive coffee table books. And recently, his pictures were picked up by a major American music archival website called Reelin' in the Years, <https://photos.reelinintheyears.com>.

Hayes believes in the old saying that the way to get good photographs is, "set your lens at f8, and most of all, be there." He was there, and his persistence is still paying off after 50 years.

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