



The Rolling Stones have their new album out this month. There is an immediate temptation to add, "their long-awaited new album," or some similar visual display of breathlessness. Even though they are knocking along in years (Bill even had to lie about his age when they first started) the Stones — despite occasional lapses of credibility — retain a rock and roll mystique. They bill themselves as the "greatest rock and roll band in the world," and some people don't even reach for a pinch of salt. A Stones' album is still an event.

Each new Rolling Stones album sparks renewed interest in previous records, so with the Stones not too far from a twentieth recording anniversary we are going to take a quick look at Stones history, mostly by way of the albums that are still available and worth re-visiting. Or indeed visiting for the first time.

The relationship of Mick Jagger and Keith Richard dates back to schooldays and a mutual interest in the blues of Chicago in the mid 1950s, the music they were later to feature in their fledgling stage act and on their debut album.

The story of how the Stones got together has been written up often enough so as to attain something of the mythical, but in fact it is a pretty ordinary sort of start. Which is not to say it isn't inspiring. It is. So is the story of the Clash's beginnings. While we haven't the space to devote to it, it is worth digging out some time. Maybe when your band has just been turfed out of the garage, or you're having big trouble with that fourth chord.

But I digress.

Essentially, after a series of personnel shifts,

Not Fade Away

by Ken Williams

the Rolling Stones became Mick Jagger, Keith Richard, Charlie Watts, Bill Wyman, and Brian Jones. In those days, Jones was virtually the leader of the Stones. His thatch of blond hair and his spoiled looks made him a visual focus that Jagger couldn't match. The group built up a strong club following, released three singles, each more successful than the last, and recorded their first album.

Debut Explosion

This was 1964, and the album, simply *The Rolling Stones*, set the world on its ear. The Stones had already delighted their fans in Britain — and incurred the wrath of the masses (situation helped in no small part by the promotional guile of Stones' manager Andrew Loog Oldham) — but it was this album which let the rest of the world in on the fact that there was more to music in England than the revered

Beatles and a host of lesser (and long-forgotten) Liverpool lights.

For me, the first Stones album was a turning point. While the Beatles had seemed quite good fun, and I really liked the hard edge on "Twist and Shout", the Stones were in every way unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was the blues, that's what it was. Or at least the blues of the Dartford Delta. I dug my old three-quarter size gut-string guitar out of the cupboard where it had been discarded, bought a pick-up, fitted it into the sound-hole, slapped on some steel strings, and watched the neck bend out of sight.

It is hard to think of another rock debut album with more impact. Perhaps there isn't one. Some of it sounds a little dated now, but most of it survives. There are some Stones classics among the R&B covers — a tremolo-drenched "Mona", which made me a Bo Diddley fanatic for some time, "Carol", which made me a Chuck Berry fanatic for even longer, and, most of all, the killer opening track, "Route 66". The song wasn't the Stones' (in fact, most of their early song-writing was in a surprisingly pop ballad vein), but in three minutes they demonstrated that it would never again be anyone else's.

The next single, "It's All Over Now", was a worldwide hit, as was a magnificent EP, *Five by Five*, both recorded at Chicago's Chess studios, the home of the R&B being championed by the Stones and other groups fast emerging as a wave of blues consciousness swept southern England for the first, but not last, time.

First Tour

Early in 1965 the Rolling Stones came to New Zealand. They played the Auckland Town Hall in the company of Roy Orbison, the Newbeats (who featured falsetto vocals) and Ray Columbus and the Invaders. It was my first pop concert. Its memory wears well. The Stones were great, but Ray Columbus was pretty hot that night, too. Ray wielded a mean maracca in those days and he had a tasty guitar team in Dave Russell and Wally Scott. Ah, the great days of package shows. Two or three or four acts with hits of the moment. It couldn't happen now. Of course, no-one played much over half an hour, but things got pretty intense.

Mick and Brian vied for the attention of the crowd, Bill and Charlie looked very bored. But at the side of the stage, constantly moving, winding and unwinding his body, was Keith Richard. Richard's animated presence and his vocal back-up to Jagger came as a surprise because none of the articles about the Stones to that point had paid much attention to Keith. He was just the lead guitarist. When the Stones toured again a year later, this time playing the Civic with the Searchers, there had been a shift in the internal balance. Jagger and the darkly-clad Richard were now in the spotlight and Jones, already looking frail, was relegated to the sideline, playing guitar and, occasionally, organ and harmonica.

Between the '65 and '66 tours, the Rolling Stones went through a golden period of recording. Catching up with some of the albums released at this time can be confusing. Track listings varied from country to country and it wasn't until *Their Satanic Majesties* in 1967 that British and American albums coincided. In New Zealand we some times got a British version, some times an American, occasionally a purely Australasian one.

The second Stones' album was known in Britain as *The Rolling Stones No. 2*. In America the album was spread over two albums, *12 x 5* and *Now!* by adding singles releases. In New Zealand an improved version of *Now!* appeared as *The Unstoppable Stones*, a splendid album, but long out of print. *12 x 5* is still available and is still great listening. It kicks off with "Around and Around", one of the songs recorded at Chess and one of the Stones' finest moments, with Keith Richard turning in one of his best impersonations of Chuck Berry. It also contains the classic singles "It's All Over Now" and "Time is on My Side", the hit version with the organ, not the more guitar-dominated cut which crops up on the Decca compilations. Excellent stuff.

By this time the Stones were moving into areas of soul, covering songs by Wilson Pickett, the Drifters, and Solomon Burke. This interest in soul reached new heights on the third (or fourth) album, *Out of Our Heads*, which had songs by Marvin Gaye, Don Covay, Sam Cooke and Otis Redding, as well as (on the US-NZ version of the album) two more Stones' classics, "The Last Time" and "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction", the first Stones' hits to come from the Jagger-Richard team.

Good Times, Bad Times

The Stones' songwriting had gained in competence and confidence enough for them to put out an album of originals, *Aftermath* (1966), which saw them moving in a poppier direction, a sort of darker parallel to the Beatles. The album has more than its share of moments, but it is very much of its time. Of interest is the Stones' first attempt at an in-studio jam, the 11 and a half minute "Goin' Home". To be fair to *Aftermath*, it might have gained more attention if it hadn't been released at the same time as the Beatles' *Revolver* and Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*. A very eclectic album, it demonstrated that Jagger-Richard was a songwriting team to rival Lennon-McCartney. It also contained some of Jagger's most vicious put-down songs.

The next album, *Between the Buttons*, was even more Swinging London. Something of an oddity among Stones' albums and all the more interesting for it. There are some good pop songs, and some tightly veiled references to the drug use that was starting to cause serious problems for the band. There had been several busts. Jones was especially affected by it all, and on the cover he appears ill and has faded into the background.

The Stones have tended to disown *Between the Buttons*, perhaps because it doesn't quite fit the image, but it is considerably more interesting than the next album, the late '67 *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, for the most part indulgence in studio electronics. Overseas it had a 3-D cover. It was definitely a product of its time — the "flower power" period was at its height and Jagger had followed the Beatles in investigating the philosophy of the Maharishi. Even to the name, *Satanic Majesties* seemed an empty attempt at emulating *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

But the Stones have always been able to pull something out of the hat. After the lost in space debacle of *Satanic Majesties*, and yet another drug bust involving Jones, the Stones rocked back with two of their finest moments, the single "Jumping Jack Flash" and the album *Beggar's Banquet*, an overdue return to roots featuring some of Richard's toughest playing and even a reworking of a 1930s blues song in "Prodigal Son".

Jones Out

But even as the world danced to the new Stones' album and classic cuts like "Sympathy for the Devil" and "Street Fighting Man" relationships within the band continued to deteriorate. Mick and Keith were now firmly in charge. The disintegrating Brian Jones was on the outer. Bill and Charlie stayed in the background like a good rhythm section.

In June 1969 Jones quit the band that had once been his. Less than a month later he was dead. His replacement, the musicianly Mick Taylor, made his debut with the band at a Hyde Park festival two days later. To the assembled throngs Jagger read an excerpt from the poet Shelley as a tribute to the dead Jones. The working class accent Jagger had acquired for the stage was more gormless than usual. It was a truly awful moment.

Not awful at all, in fact brilliant, was the next Stones' album, *Let It Bleed* (1969). In some ways it was a Keith Richard album in that he was the only member of the group to play on every track. Virtually every cut, from the apocalyptic "Gimme Shelter" to Keith's lilting country song, "You Got the Silver", and on to the anthemic "You Can't Always Get What You Want" is a certified classic.

The achievement of *Let It Bleed* was marred by the events of the accompanying American tour. There was a killing and general ugliness at the outdoor concert in Altamont, California. The events are captured graphically in the film *Gimme Shelter*.

Get Yer Ya-Yas Out was a live set issued primarily to counter the flood of bootlegs from the 1969 tour. Some people call it the greatest live album ever. It certainly has its moments, but I wouldn't go so far.

The next album came out on the Stones' own label. Their severing of the connection with Decca set in motion a seemingly endless series of compilation albums, most of them of negligible value. *Sticky Fingers* is especially notable for two songs, "Brown Sugar", a classic Stones' single to be sure but one which also shows the group straining for an image pose, and Mississippi Fred McDowell's "You Gotta Move", which shows that no matter how jetset and debauched they were becoming Mick and Keith were still able to do justice to the blues music that had been the Stones' original *raison d'être*.

Main Street Magic

Sticky Fingers seems a mere pit stop compared with the sprawling album that followed. The double *Exile on Main Street* was sprawling and this was probably why it was so casually dismissed at the time. Two years later it was being hailed as a work of genius by the critics who had scoffed first time around. Now any half-way good rock album is compared with *Exile*. Keith Richard notes wryly that *Exile*, on which his mark is stamped strongly, was slugged, but whenever a subsequent Stones' album has been given a roasting it has always been compared unfavourably with the masterwork, *Exile*. If *Exile* had a problem it was too many good songs. The Stones' wouldn't have that problem again for a while.


Goat's Head Soup (1973) and "It's Only Rock 'n' Roll" (1974) have their moments, but the overall impression is of marking time. "Fingerprint File" on *Rock 'n' Roll* showed an increasing interest in black dance music and was a pointer to the future.

In December 1974 Mick Taylor left the group. For the American tour of the following year Ron Wood of the Faces replaced Taylor on a temporary basis before eventually joining permanently.

The 1976 *Black and Blue* reflects the Stones' search for a guitarist to replace Taylor. There are numerous guest appearances, but despite

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

Rooftop
Shore City
Takapuna



498-142
Open until
3-00am

KICKS

FOR THE BEST IN ROCK

JULY 17-19
TOM SHARPLIN's
ROCK'N'ROLL BAND
PUSH

JULY 24-26
TOP SCIENTISTS
COUP D'ETAT

JULY 31 TO AUGUST 2
SPELLING MISTAKES
FLIGHT X-7

AUGUST 7-9
TECHTONES
ARIEL

FULLY LICENSED