

The Rolling Stones

By Michael Hill



MAY 1965: In a Florida hotel room, Keith Richards wakes up hearing a riff in his head that he has to play for Mick Jagger immediately. The pair begin to work on a song that initially has a folkish feel but takes on a more hard-edged shape a few days later at Chicago's Chess Studio. Within a week, it's completed at the RCA Studios in Hollywood. The song is "Satisfaction," and it's destined for inclusion in their new album, *Out of Our Heads*. It's also destined, with a deft leap to the top of the American charts, to be the band's first Number One, to define, decisively and dramatically, the sound and the attitude of the Rolling Stones.

They had always wanted to sing the blues, and now they were doing it – in their own fashion, with their own voice and with their own words. It was a different sort of blues, for sure: "Satisfaction" simultaneously suggested a pop star's premature world-weariness, a consumer's constant confusion and a lover's frustrated desire – set to the meanest groove east of Detroit. On the surface, "Satisfaction" was crude and sexy, but beyond Jagger's snarls and slurs and a riff that would launch a thousand combos, the song was savvy and cynical, jabbing social commentary wrapped in adolescent petulance.

The blues had brought the Rolling Stones together. Jagger and

Richards had been childhood acquaintances but had drifted apart when Richards's family moved out of the neighborhood. The pair resumed their friendship in 1960, after Richards, a technical-school dropout, bumped into Jagger, a student at the London School of Economics, on a local train and noticed the blues albums Jagger was carrying. The enterprising Jagger was a serious collector, writing away to Chess Records, in Chicago, for titles he couldn't secure at home, and he already fronted a group called Little Boy Blue and the Blue Boys.

Richards, who leaned more to Chuck Berry's rock & roll and the Everly Brothers' country-inflected pop, soon became a Blue Boy himself, as well as Jagger's roommate. Together they scoured the London blues scene, which centered on the Ealing Club and its house band, Blues Incorporated, featuring "the grandfather of British rock," Alexis Korner. It was there that Jagger and Richards first saw the already up-and-coming guitarist Brian Jones. They became fast friends, carousing, living and performing together. The trio, accompanied by Ian Stewart and Tony Chapman, even recorded a demo tape, which was promptly rejected by EMI.

As Jagger's and Richards's talents became apparent, they were welcomed into Korner's musical circle. Jagger and Richards sat in with

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Blues Incorporated (although purists remained wary of Korman's predilection for rock & roll). Blues Incorporated graduated to the larger Marquee Club, and that was where the earliest version of the Rolling Stones made its debut on July 12th, 1962.

Korman had skipped his usual gig to perform on a live BBC-radio broadcast, so Jagger, who hadn't been invited along, took the opportunity to book himself, Richards, Jones, bassist Dick Taylor (a Blue Boy who later joined the Pretty Things), drummer Mick Avory (who became a Kink) and keyboardist Ian Stewart (who would remain a behind-the-scenes Stone). For subsequent gigs, they advertised themselves as "Brian Jones and Mick Jagger and the Rollin' Stones," their group name paying homage to Muddy Waters in the way the Beatles' moniker saluted Buddy Holly's Crickets, and they began to create a small stir for their unlikely mélange of American blues and current R&B.

The three principals carried on with a revolving-door rhythm section until they convinced a rather skeptical Charlie Watts, a former drummer for Blues Incorporated, to sign on. They auditioned an equally cautious Bill Wyman, whose professional-looking amplifier, as well as his bass playing, made him the most attractive candidate.

In February 1963 iconoclastic entrepreneur Giorgio Gomelsky offered the Stones a regular gig at his new Crawdaddy Club, at the Station Hotel, in Richmond. (The original house band, the Dave Hunt Rhythm & Blues Band, featuring a guitarist named Ray Davies, was sacked after it failed to show up one night.) The Stones attracted a growing following of fans, as well as fellow musicians, including various Beatles, and curious members of the press.

They also attracted an ambitious nineteen-year-old named Andrew Loog Oldham, then employed as a press officer by Beatles manager

Brian Epstein. Just as Epstein had happened upon the Beatles at the Cavern Club and insisted then and there that he manage the group, Oldham instantly saw in the Stones a chance to exploit the "opposite to what the Beatles were doing," something more raw, rough and even a little dangerous. "I was about forty-eight hours ahead of the rest of the business in getting there," Oldham told the *New Musical Express* ten years later. The Stones, especially Jones, were impressed by Oldham's brashness and felt comfortable with his youth. Oldham brought in an older investor, Eric Easton, and then set about making the Rolling Stones famous.

Getting a record deal this time around wasn't particularly difficult. Dick Rowe, an A&R man from Decca, known in the industry for having turned down the Beatles, wasn't about to lose out again after he received a casual tip from George Harrison during a talent contest they were both judging. Harrison had come to the Crawdaddy and liked what he saw. A week after the Stones signed their contract with Oldham, they were in Olympic Recording Studios, cutting their first sides for Decca — with Oldham, who had never before set foot in a studio, producing.

The result was their debut single, Chuck Berry's "Come On," backed with Willie Dixon's "I Want to Be Loved," which reached Number Twenty-one on the U.K. charts, and the Stones appeared on the TV show *Thank Your Lucky Stars*. One of the show's producers took Oldham aside and advised him to dump "that vile-looking singer with tired lips." They also scored a supporting berth on tour with the Everly Brothers and Bo Diddley. The follow-up single, "I Wanna Be Your Man," which cracked the British Top Twenty, had been given to them by its writers, John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

In January 1964 the Stones began their first headlining U.K. tour, accompanied by the Ronettes. Phil Spector saw sufficient



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threat in the Stones' image to send them a telegram ordering them to "stay away from my girls." The Stones' third single, a version of Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away," made it to Number Three in Britain and provided a modest entry to American radio via London Records. Although Spector may have wanted to keep the Stones at bay where the Ronettes were concerned, he was impressed with their music. He played maracas on "Not Fade Away" and co-wrote the B side, "Little By Little," with the group.

Spector also sat in on the sessions for the group's first LP, *The Rolling Stones*. Released in April 1964, on Decca, the album caused a sensation throughout England. It knocked the Beatles from the top of the charts and generated both excitement and controversy for its interpretations of the work of such black American songwriters as Chuck Berry, Slim Harpo, Jimmy Reed and Bo Diddley. Jagger responded to those who doubted the seriousness of the group's intentions in a letter to *Melody Maker*: "To the critics, them, who think we're a beat group who came up overnight, knowing nothing about it, we invite them to examine our record collection. It contains things by Jimmy Reed, Elmore James, Hooker and a stack of private tapes by Little Walter. . . ."

However pure the Stones' musical aspirations might have been at the time, the adult public was unanimous in its shock at the seeming impurity of their behavior, a perception Oldham did nothing to discourage. "Everything seems to be against them on the surface," a writer in the *Daily Mirror* remarked. "They are called the ugliest group in Britain. They are not looked upon kindly by most parents or by adults in general. They are used to the type of article that asks big brother if he would let his sister go out with one of them." The tabloid *News of the World* wasn't quite so objective, branding the Stones "five indolent morons [who] give one the feeling that they enjoy wallowing in a swill-tub of their own repulsiveness."

Arriving in America in June 1964, for a whirlwind tour, the Stones were described by the Associated Press as "dirtier and streakier and more disheveled than the Beatles, and, in some places, they are more popular than the Beatles." The Stones garnered the most attention during their short stay for a visit to their spiritual home, Chess Studios, in Chicago, where they recorded tracks for a British EP and met a few of their biggest heroes, Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon. (One of the Chess tracks, "Little Red Rooster," was banned in America for Jagger's allegedly lascivious rendering of the lyrics. It reached Number One, however, in Britain.)

In America the Stones found not only their mentors and the places and faces that populated their songs but also a quality of recording that surpassed anything they had experienced back home. Their British chart-topping "It's All Over Now," which featured Jagger's much-censored (in the States, at least) reference to "half-assed games," was recorded in the U.S., as were most of the tracks for their second album. The Stones returned to the States in the fall, bolstered by the Top Ten showing of "Time Is on My Side," and appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Sullivan, naturally, was appalled. "I promise you they'll never be back on our show," he told the press. "Frankly, I didn't see the group before the broadcast. They were recommended by my scouts in England. I was shocked when I saw them. It took me years to build this show; I'm not going to have it destroyed in a matter of weeks."

If the Rolling Stones seemed a threat to home and hearth as blues-bested bad boys in a field of mop-tops, in 1965 they turned downright subversive when Jagger and Richards emerged as a potent and hit-worthy songwriting team. Although they aimed for the top of the charts, that wasn't their only target. They were as precocious and prescient as Lennon and McCartney. They anticipated the moods of their peers; pioneered, at the urging of Brian Jones, exotic instrumentation on humble rock & roll tracks; and unsettled their elders with barbed commentary on the lifestyles of the rich and English. Their string of major hits began with the entirely self-penned "The Last Time," backed with "Play with Fire." Jagger, the journeyman blues singer, swaggered on the A side and smoldered on the flip; his lyrics translated the sexual audacity of Stones' favorites like "I'm a King Bee" and "Little Red Rooster" to a setting any of

their hip suburban peers could understand.

Then came "Satisfaction."

Jagger and Richards won an audience beyond teens looking for new rave raves to call their own. College kids, critics and assorted hipsters began to appreciate the Stones' rebelliousness, arrogance, intensity and devil-may-care look. They were the prototype for a new kind of youth style that would evolve and grow as the music exerted an ever more powerful influence on mores as well as fashion. The acclaim of this burgeoning audience would be matched by outrage from the powers that be; even Oldham would not be able to contain things once the press, not to mention the police, turned ugly.

In 1965 the Stones' troubles remained fairly innocuous: they were summoned to court for urinating on a gas-station wall after they were refused admittance to the restroom. (They were ultimately fined three pounds each for "insulting behavior.") "Satisfaction," too, had the distinction of being banned on many American radio stations for its allegedly suggestive lyrics. (Thanks to Jagger's delivery, programmers seemed more frightened of what they couldn't understand than the lyrics they could decipher.)

Aftermath, released in April 1966, was the first Stones album to contain all Jagger-Richards originals. Over the next few months it shared illustrious company on the charts: the Beatles' *Revolver* and Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*. The record matched the formidable competition with brittle, unsentimental pop that strayed far from the Stones' blues roots. The Stones didn't simply explore the vicissitudes of romance; they detailed the battle of the sexes blow by blow. Tracks like "Out of Time," with its deceptively jaunty marimba accents, "Under My Thumb" and "Stupid Girl" seemed like misogynist tracts but really addressed issues of class as well as sex. "Lady Jane" cast them as latter-day Elizabethans, with Brian Jones on dulcimer, one of the many arcane embellishments he contributed to the record. "Mother's Little Helper," on the British edition, approached the newly fashionable subject of drugs, which had certainly been broached by the Beatles and Dylan. The Stones, however, turned the tables on the topic, attacking the middle-class for hiding its own addictions.

In the summer of 1966, the Stones returned to America for their fifth tour, which would be the last with the original lineup. As Jagger and Richards began to dominate the band, Jones, who had initially been the band's sex symbol and most accomplished guitar player, began to distance himself from the music and the band (and became more and more familiar with the sex-and-drugs part of the rock & roll equation).

In January 1967, Ed Sullivan once again booked the band, despite his previous qualms, and once again came away appalled (commercial canniness prevented him from banning them, though). Jones looked decidedly decadent during "Lady Jane," and Jagger carried on in Elizabethan foppery, leaning and sneering at the cameras. The band took this outrageousness even further during a Manhattan photo session by posing in drag for the single sleeve of "Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby (Standing in the Shadow)," a song Jagger described as "the ultimate freakout . . . what more can we say?" Their following single, "Let's Spend the Night Together," was introduced with another characteristically controversial spot on Sullivan — did Jagger mutter "night," "sometime" or "mmmmmm" on that saucy chorus? The lyrics prompted radio programmers to go with the flip side, the pastoral "Ruby Tuesday." (Few knew that the name was purported to belong to a famous groupie.)

In 1967 the band, back in the U.K., was beset by more than just tabloid troubles. Within a month of the release of *Between the Buttons*, which contained the unjustly overlooked "Miss Amanda Jones" and the teasing music-hall sendup "Something Happened to Me Yesterday," the media's former playfulness had turned to harassment, which led to drug busts that effectively put the band out of commission as a touring unit for more than just the Summer of Love. It was an ironic turn of events: the Beatles had chosen to retire to the shelter of the studio, Dylan was about to be sidelined by his mysterious motorcycle accident, and the Stones were stymied by court dates and the threat of jail. Even the London *Times* had to sympathize with the band finally, declaring a miscarriage

