

The Rolling Stones

BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

The Rolling Stones, having outlasted nearly all of their 1960s contemporaries, continue to belt out hits well into middle age. Original members included lead singer Mick Jagger (Michael Philip Jagger, born July 26, 1943, in Dartford, Kent, England); guitarist Keith Richard (surname sometimes listed as Richards, born December 18, 1943, in Dartford, Kent, England); guitarist Brian Jones (Lewis Brian Hopkins-Jones, born February 28, 1942, in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, England, drowned, July 3, 1969); drummer Tony Chapman; bass player Dick Taylor; and pianist Ian Stewart. Drummer Charlie Watts (Charles Robert Watts, born June 2, 1941, in Islington, England) replaced Chapman c. 1962; bass guitarist Bill Wyman (William Perks, born October 24, 1936 [some sources say 1941]) replaced Dick Taylor c. 1962; guitarist Mick Taylor (born January 17, 1948, in Hertfordshire, England) replaced Jones, July 1969; guitarist Ron Wood (born June 1, 1947, in London, England) replaced Mick Taylor, 1975; bass guitarist Darryl Jones replaced Bill Wyman, 1993. Current members include Jagger, Richard, Watts, Wood, and Jones.

Often billed as "the world's greatest **rock** and roll band," the Rolling Stones have earned the title; if not for their musical prowess, then certainly for their longevity. Formation of the group began back as early as 1949 when Keith Richard and Mick Jagger, both from Dartford, England, went to school together. It would take another eleven years, however, before their paths would cross again. To their amazement, they discovered that both of them had grown up listening to the same great American bluesmen and rockers like Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley. The two formed a friendship that was based around one common interest: music.

At the time, Jagger was attending London's School of Economics while Richard was struggling at Sidcup Art College. Soon they found out about a local musician named Alexis Korner who held blues jams at the Ealing Club. After Jagger began to sing for Korner's Blues Incorporated, he decided to join a group that Richard was putting together. Other members included Ian Stewart, Dick Taylor, Tony Chapman, and a guitar player named Brian Jones.

Jones was quite different from the rest of the lads. Although only one year older than Jagger and Richard, he had already parented two illegitimate children by the time he was sixteen. And while Richard was more into the Berry school of **rock** guitar, Jones was pure blues and often referred to himself as Elmo Lewis (in reference to the slide guitarist, Elmore James).

Charlie Watts was already making a fair living drumming for a jazz combo when he was persuaded to replace Tony Chapman. The oldest member, a rocking bassist, Bill Wyman, hooked up immediately after to complete the rhythm section. With the shrewd talents of manager/publicist Andrew Loog Oldham, they began opening for Blues Inc. at London's Marquee Club in 1963, billed as "Brian Jones and The Rollin' Stones" (after a Muddy Waters tune). Dick Taylor was no longer in the band at this time.

With hair longer than any other group and an attitude that made the Beatles look like choir boys, the Stones took full advantage of their image as "the group parents love to hate." "That old idea of not letting white children listen to black music is true," Jagger told Jonathan Cott, "cause if you want white children to remain what they are, they mustn't." Their negative public image was constantly fueled by Oldham, who also decided that Stewart's neanderthal presence did not fit in with the rest of the band and so delegated him to the background, never seen but often heard. Oldham quickly secured the Stones a contract with Decca Records and in June of 1963 they released their first single, a cover of Chuck Berry's "Come On" backed with "I Want to Be Loved." Reaction was good and it would only take another six months for the group to make it big. Continuing their eight-month residence at the Crawdaddy Club in Richmond, they released their version of the Beatles' "I Wanna Be Your Man" followed by Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away," which made it to Number 3 in Great Britain. Their fourth single would climb all the way to the top in their homeland, "It's All Over Now" by Bobby Womack. Their next hit, "Little Red Rooster," likewise reached Number 1 but was banned in the United States.

Satisfaction

The Rolling Stones already had two albums out in England by the time they broke the U.S. Top 10 with "The Last Time," written by Jagger and Richard. And in the summer of 1965 they had a worldwide Number 1 hit with "Satisfaction." Propelled by Richard's fuzz-tone riff and Jagger's lyrics of a man who couldn't get enough, the song immediately secured a seat in **rock** history. Oldham had played up the outlaw image of the band to the point where they became the image, and he was no longer needed.

Allan Klein took over as manager and in 1966, after having relied on other artist's songs, they released their first all-originals LP, *Aftermath*. The band was plagued with drug busts during the psychedelic era and in 1967 recorded their reply to the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's LonelyBand*, titled *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. The album paled in comparison to the Beatles' masterpiece and is noted mainly as the last album Brian Jones truly worked on, having become too involved in drugs.

With Jones largely out for the count, Richard came into his own on 1968's *Beggars Banquet*. His acoustic guitar sounded as full as an orchestra on "Street Fighting Man," and one of the most deadly electric solos of all time can be found on "Sympathy for the Devil." It was obvious the Stones didn't need Jones dragging them down anymore and he officially quit (or was booted out) on June 9, 1969. Less than one month later he was found drowned in a swimming pool with the official cause listed as "death by misadventure."

Two days later, the Stones had their replacement in Mick Taylor, former guitarist for John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. His first gig was a free concert in memory of Jones at Hyde Park. Taylor's influence would bring the level of musicianship up a few notches until he quit in 1975. Their first album after he joined was still mostly a Richard album, however. *Let It Bleed* was released to coincide with an American tour and contained two haunting tunes, "Midnight Rambler" and "Gimme Shelter." The latter became the title of the movie documenting the Stones' free concert at Altamont, California, at which Hell's Angels members (hired as security guards)

stabbed a youth to death right in front of the stage. The group also released an album from that tour, *Get Yer Ya Ya's Out*.

Exiles

In 1971 The Stones formed their own label, Rolling Stones Records, and began to expand their musical horizons. *Sticky Fingers* contained jazz with "Can't You Hear Me Knockin'," while the country-flavored "Dead Flowers" continued the trend of "Honky Tonk Women." Their next album, *Exile on Main Street*, oddly enough, was dismissed by critics when it came out, but over the years has come to be regarded as probably their finest recording. With Richard hanging out with Gram Parsons, the country influence was stronger than ever but the album also contains gospel ("I Just Want To See His Face"), blues ("Shake Your Hips"), and full-tilt **rock** ("Rip This Joint"). It is four sides of vintage Stones at their tightest, and loosest.

Their next two albums, *Goat's Head Soup* and *It's Only **Rock** and Roll*, contain both outstanding tracks and what some critics considered real dogs. "Time Waits For No One," with a beautiful solo by Taylor, shows just how much the Stones had changed, yet tracks like "Star Star" reveal just the opposite: the bad boys of **rock** just couldn't grow up. Five years was enough for Taylor and in 1975 he decided to walk away from one of the most sought-after positions in **rock**. "The fact is I was becoming stagnant and lazy with the Stones. I really got off on playing with them, but it wasn't enough of a challenge," he told *Rolling Stone*.

Rumors about who would take Taylor's place included such guitar greats as Roy Buchanan, Jeff Beck, Peter Dinklage, and Rory Gallagher, but the obvious choice was Faces guitarist, Ron Wood. Wood fit the Stones mold perfectly, with the same musical roots and a look that was almost a carbon copy of Richard. Wood pinch-hit for Taylor on the 1975 tour of America, bounding back and forth with the Faces before finally joining the Stones full-time. The first full album he contributed to was *Black and Blue* in 1976. Once again the Stones stretched out by dabbling in reggae ("Cherry Oh"), disco ("Hot Stuff"), and a smoky lounge lizard treatment on "Melody." The group's future was in doubt in 1977 when Richard was busted in Toronto for heroin dealing, but his sentence did not include any jail time. "Drugs were never a problem," he told Edna Gundersen. "Policemen were a problem."

After 1978's classic *Some Girls*, the next Stones' records seem indistinguishable from each other. The songs are vehicles for Richard's guitar hooks with nothing equaling the emotion of previous hits like "You Can't Always Get What You Want" or "Moonlight Mile." Only the hit "Start Me Up" stands out from this period.

Everyone Was Hating Each Other

During the 1980s, rumors swirled constantly that the Rolling Stones would break up. Jagger would do nothing to dispel the rumors. Richard was reportedly not too happy when Jagger took time off to work on his solo album (even though Wyman and Wood both have records outside the group). Then Jagger refused to tour to support the Stones' *Dirty Work* LP, instead hitting the road to promote his own *She's The Boss*. "Touring *Dirty Work* would have been a nightmare," Jagger told *Rolling Stone*, "It was a terrible period. Everyone was hating each other so much; there were so

many disagreements. It was very petty; everyone was so out of their brains, and Charlie was in seriously bad shape ... It would have been the worst Rolling Stones tour. Probably would have been the end of the band." Richard, who had himself toured with Wood's New Barbarians in 1979, was outraged that Jagger would make the Stones a second choice. "I felt like I had failed. I couldn't keep my band together," he told the *Detroit Free Press*. Pursuing his own solo project, he stated that the Stones will "have to wait for me. They kind of pushed me into this solo thing, which I really didn't want, and now they're paying a price." Richard released his own album, *Talk Is Cheap*, with plenty of barbs for Jagger. "I'm enjoying myself too much to all of a sudden stop," Richard said.

And for a while in the 1980s, it seemed that the Stones had in fact broken up. Jagger was pursuing his solo career, barely speaking to Richard. The partners took turns sniping at each other through the press. As Jagger related in *Rolling Stone*, "Everyone was bored playing with each other. We'd reached a period when we were tired of it all. Bill [Wyman] was not enthusiastic to start with--there's a guy that doesn't really want to do much... You've got Charlie overdoing it in all directions ... Keith the same. Me the same ... We just got fed up with each other. You've got a relationship with **musicians** that depends on what you produce together. But when you don't produce ... You get difficult periods, and that was one of them."

Still the World's Greatest **Rock** and Roll Band

But rumors of the band's breakup had to be put on hold in 1989, when the Stones announced plans for a new album and a world tour. A favorite with critics, *Steel Wheels* quickly sold over two million copies. The tour, however, which was sponsored by Anheuser-Busch, was attacked by many for being blatantly over-commercialized. Despite the criticism, the *Steel Wheels Tour*--which reportedly raked in over \$140 million--was a hit with music reviewers and fans. The 1990 *Rolling Stone* readers' and critics' polls selected the Stones as best band and artist of the year, and cited *Steel Wheels* as 1989's best tour.

The group's ability to overcome internal dissension and the toll of more than 25 years in **rock** and roll's fast lane to put together the industry's success story of the year surprised some observers, but not the Stones themselves. "The Stones, it's a weird thing, it's almost like a soap opera," Richard told *Rolling Stone*. "We needed a break to find out what you can and can't do on your own. I had to find myself a whole new band... But then I realized maybe that's the way to keep the band together: leaving for a bit... I never doubted the band, personally--but I'm an incredible optimist where this band is concerned. It never occurred to me that they might not be able to cut it. Absolutely not."

But *Steel Wheels* was to be Bill Wyman's last album and tour with the Stones--he announced his retirement in 1993. With Darryl Jones replacing Wyman, the Stones next released *Voodoo Lounge*, an album that in many ways was meant to recall the classic Stones sound of the early 1970s. The announcement for the subsequent tour was greeted with complaints from some critics that the Stones were simply too old, just going through the motions. But that album would go on to sell four million copies, and the supporting tour, which featured 22 songs from the band's 30-year history, went on to become the highest grossing tour of all time.

The years when a Rolling Stones breakup seemed a certainty have passed. As a change of pace from their usual mammoth concert tours, the Stones made a brief sweep of Europe, playing in far smaller venues, typically of less than 1,000 seats, such as the Paradiso in Amsterdam. For that tour, the Stones presented a more stripped down, more acoustic set, featuring songs like the Stones chestnut "The Spider and the Fly," "Shine a Light," from *Exiles*, and the Bob Dylan classic "Like a Rolling Stone." From that tour, the group released the live album "Stripped."

The experience seemed to bring new life to the band, and more certainty to the band's future, although the band remains noncommittal. "I don't think Charlie's wildly enthusiastic, nor am I," Jagger told *Rolling Stone*, "But I dare say the Rolling Stones will do more shows together ... I don't know exactly what framework [that] would take ... But I'm sure there will be Rolling Stones music and there will be Rolling Stones songs."

The Stones and their former record label ABKCO lost a court battle on June 27, 2000, involving the band's covers of two tunes by blues legend Robert Johnson. The band recorded the songs in the late '60s and early '70s; they thought copyrights on "Love in Vain" and "Stop Breakin' Down" had expired. However, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals rejected that argument and said the band could owe royalties. The case was sent back to the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles for further hearings.

Selected recordings on London Records include *England's Newest Hit Makers--The Rolling Stones*, 1964; *12x5*, 1964; *The Rolling Stones Now!*, 1965; *Out of Our Heads*, 1965; *December's Children*, 1965; *Big Hits (High Tide and Green Grass)*, 1966; *Got Live If You Want It!*, 1966; *Between the Buttons*, 1967; *Flowers*, 1967; *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, 1967; *Beggars Banquet*, 1968; *Through the Past Darkly*, 1969; *Let It Bleed*, 1969; *Get Yer Ya Yas Out*, 1970. On Rolling Stone Records, except as noted: *Sticky Fingers*, 1971; *Hot Rocks: 1964-1971*, London Records, 1972; *Exile on Main Street*, 1972; *More Hot Rocks (Big Hits & Fazed Cookies)*, London Records; *Goat's Head Soup*, 1973; *It's Only **Rock** 'n' Roll*, 1974; *Made in the Shade*, 1975; *Metamorphosis*, ABKCO, 1975; *Black and Blue*, 1976; *Love You Live*, 1977; *Some Girls*, 1978; *Emotional Rescue*, 1980; *Sucking in the Seventies*, 1981. On Virgin Records: *Tattoo You*, 1981; *Undercover*, 1983; *Dirty Work*, 1986; *Steel Wheels*, 1989; *Voodoo Lounge*, 1993; *Stripped*, 1995; *The Rolling Stones **Rock** & Roll Circus*, ABKCO, 1996.

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Recent Updates

September 16, 2003: The Rolling Stones' album, *Sympathy For The Devil Remixes (x7)*, was released. **Source:** Yahoo! Shopping, shopping.yahoo.com/shop?d=product&id=1921994449, September 17, 2003.

July 27, 2004: The Rolling Stones' collection, *Singles 1965-1967*, was released. **Source:** *Billboard.com*, www.billboard.com/bb/releases/week_4/index.jsp, August 5, 2004.

September 16, 2004: Abkco Records announced the October of 2004 release of *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus* on DVD. **Source:** E! Online, www.eonline.com, September 16, 2004.

November 11, 2004: The Rolling Stones were inducted into the first U.K. Music Hall of Fame, representing the 1960s. **Source:** *USA Today*, www.usatoday.com/life/music/news/2004-11-12-brit-music-faves_x.htm, November 15, 2004.

January 2005: The Rolling Stones' 1969 album, *Let It Bleed*, was entered into the Grammy Hall of Fame. **Source:** BBC News, news.bbc.co.uk, February 14, 2005.

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