

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

The

Rolling Stones

by
Sean Egan



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Part One: The Life



From the Stones' first publicity shoot, 4 May 1963,
before playing a short gig at Battersea Pleasure Gardens.



Early Days

1961–63

Maybe it was the quite disparate social backgrounds and musical tastes of the individuals who came together to form The Rolling Stones in the early Sixties that has contributed to their sustained invention and longevity. That and, above all, a sheer delight in playing music live. Over almost half a century the Stones (as a band) have outlived their contemporaries and competitors and have played to more people than any other group of musicians. How did this extraordinary story start?

A Meeting of Minds

The famous meeting on a train between **Mick Jagger** and **Keith Richards** at Dartford Railway Station in October 1961 effectively marks the beginning of the story of The Rolling Stones. It's a meeting so glowing with poetic resonance that it feels apocryphal, but there is little doubt that it happened.

The paths of these two sons of **Dartford** had bisected before. Both were born in 1943, had lived a street apart when very young, and they had gone to the same primary school. Their paths diverged at the age of eleven. Although Richards later bought a cornet off Jagger when the latter was working on an ice cream trolley, by 1961 they had not met for a long time. Jagger was a middle-class son of a PE teacher and housewife while Richards had working-

class origins, growing up in a council house, his father an unskilled practitioner of various trades. In '61, Jagger was a pupil at the **London School of Economics**. Like Jagger, Richards also took the train to a seat of higher learning each morning, although they didn't normally catch the same train. Richards' place of study was **Sidcup Art College**.

It transpired that the two now had a bit more in common than the fact that they both hailed from the same town 16 miles south-east of London. Richards was intrigued, even amazed, to see that under his arm Jagger was carrying a selection of albums by the likes of **Chuck Berry**, **Little Walter** and **Muddy Waters**. Coverage of blues and R&B was then sparse indeed, when the BBC still had a monopoly of the radio waves and exercised that monopoly – perhaps understandably – to appeal to the

Art School Rockers

Keith Richards had no aspirations to be a painter but had opted to go to art school because it was a place in which he could practise his guitar chops while picking up a handy grant from the taxpayer at the same time. Many of his generation had exactly the same idea, and many art school students of the era went on to become famous musicians or singers, Jeff Beck, Eric Burdon, Eric Clapton, John Lennon, Jimmy Page and Pete Townshend among them.

Rockers from art school backgrounds who became famous in the Seventies include David Bowie and Roxy Music's Bryan Ferry. (Ferry – who attended an arts course at Newcastle University – was, in fact, one of the few art-schoolers-turned-pop-stars who started out with a serious interest in his subject.) Bowie and Roxy Music could be said to be artists who actually employed their art studies in their music and public personas, the unashamed artifice and self-consciousness of some of their work suggesting an ingrained concern with imagery which led them to be described in some quarters as 'art-rock'.

With the subsequent decline of the grants system in favour of student loans, British rock will now have to find a new source by which to nurture young talent.

lowest common denominator; so, lovers of this type of music existed virtually isolated from each other and, of course a concept like the internet which could point you in the direction of fellow enthusiasts was literally the stuff of science fiction. To encounter another by chance was like meeting a long-lost brother.

Almost inevitably, Richards joined **Little Boy Blue** and the **Blue Boys**, a group of Jagger's mates and acquaintances who played R&B informally; Jagger was the vocalist and sometime guitarist. One of those mates and acquaintances was guitarist **Dick Taylor** who, it so happened, was also a student at Sidcup. Taylor noticed a change in the band almost immediately. His words about it bring to mind so many subsequent reviews of Stones records and concerts in which it has been observed that Richards is the engine-house of the Stones' sound: "... you could feel something holding the band together." Similarly, when Taylor also told a journalist, "Keith sounded great – but he wasn't flash," he was succinctly making the point that has been made (sometimes over the course of entire books) that Richards manages to be one of the ultimate guitar gods while not indulging in the masturbatory meanderings of many lead guitarists.

Mick also seems to have appreciated something was in the air, even if subliminally: he began drifting away from the guitar and concentrating on the **harmonica**, an instrument on which his proficiency – several musicians attest – is genuinely significant. It was at the point of Richards' arrival that Jagger's mother, Eva, began to worry. It was then that she felt for the first time that Jagger was thinking of pursuing professionally what had hitherto been merely a hobby. Her misgivings seem from today's perspective, of course, perfectly ludicrous but at the time were perfectly right: the blues was a form of music created from the experience of

What Is Rhythm and Blues?

Though they eventually acquired the title “The Greatest Rock ‘n’ Roll Band in the World”, The Rolling Stones were originally anxious to emphasize that they were a rhythm and blues, not a rock’n’roll, band. Debate on what rhythm and blues – or R&B – constitutes is practically endless.

R&B was essentially a faster, more exciting and less depressive form of its American black music antecedent, the blues (often referred to as twelve-bar blues), by virtue of it being crossed with ‘jump blues’, an up-tempo, almost big-band form of the blues, that had jazz influences. Though both the blues and R&B were characterized by 12-bar music progressions, R&B was less repetitive (the blues usually involved the repeat of the first and third lines of each verse), less depressing (not so inclined to laments about love and loss) and more exciting (inclined to breakneck tempos). R&B dispensed with the brass sections of jump blues in favour of a slimmed-down set-up reliant on guitars. Rock’n’roll was a mixture of black and white forms of music, combining R&B with country music. Though there are obviously overlaps between the genres, Eddie Cochran, Bill Haley and Elvis Presley were ‘rock’n’roll’, while Bo Diddley, Jimmy Reed and Muddy Waters were R&B. Chuck Berry is usually considered a rock’n’roll artist but probably stands squarely between the two brands.

Though rock’n’roll was very exciting, to some it was diluted: R&B was grittier and less tainted by the whiff of commercial compromise. This feeling began to grow stronger when the first wave of late Fifties rock’n’roll heroes began to fade and were replaced by less wild-looking and sounding artists like Bobby Darin and Bobby Vee, who managed to squeeze all the grit out of the genre while utilizing a never-changing repertoire of increasingly cheesy-sounding licks and progressions, a stagnant situation

which lasted until The Beatles completely rejuvenated rock’n’roll in the early Sixties.

To add to the confusion, rock’n’roll – or more often ‘rock’ – eventually became a term used as an umbrella title for just about all post-Elvis popular music, including R&B. Even more confusingly, the term R&B was hijacked in the Nineties to describe a completely new form of black music which had nothing in common with rhythm and blues, other than that most of its practitioners were black.

Clearly, these definitions are a vexed and never-ending subject for those passionate about it, and reams have been devoted to the issue. However, it so happens that one of the best entries into the debate was made by none other than pre-fame Rolling Stones member Brian Jones in a letter to *Jazz News* published in October 1962:

“It appears there exists in this country a growing confusion as to exactly what form of music the term ‘Rhythm & Blues’ applies to. There further appears to be a movement here to promote what would be better termed ‘Soul Jazz’ as Rhythm & Blues. Surely we must accept that R&B is the American city Negro’s ‘pop’ music – nothing more, nothing less.

“Rhythm & Blues can hardly be considered a form of jazz. It is not based on improvisation as is the latter. The impact is, and can only be, emotional. It would be ludicrous if the same type of pseudo-intellectual snobbery that one unfortunately finds contaminating the jazz scene were to be applied to anything as basic and vital as rhythm & blues.

“It must be apparent that Rock’n’Roll has a far greater affinity for R&B than the latter has for jazz, insofar as Rock is a direct corruption of Rhythm and Blues whereas jazz is Negro music on a different plane, intellectually higher, though emotionally less intense.”

being black, American and oppressed. It being clearly the case that nobody would want to hear white, privileged, welfare state English kids playing facsimiles of it rather than the real thing, it was patently obvious that making a living – let alone carving a career – by playing it was an absurd concept. If any of the embryonic Stones had actually sat down and thought about it, especially the very bright Jagger, they would have come to the same conclusion. History, however, is not just made by rational decisions. Something that had nothing to do with logic made the band members persevere with, indeed increase their commitment to, the group. Ultimately, this would lead to some members of the band achieving greater commercial and artistic success than every one of their blues heroes and amassing wealth beyond the dreams of even the most successful graduate of the London School of Economics.

Going Public

By March 1962, the Blue Boys came to the quite staggering realization that there were actually several hundred people in Britain who were into the same kind of music as they. It was in that month that one **Alexis Korner** started a weekly R&B club in the Ealing Club, West London. Richards and Taylor stared in amazement at the advertisement for it that Korner placed in weekly music paper, *Melody Maker*. Jagger was similarly astounded when they showed it to him. Korner's own band **Blues Incorporated** were on the bill, and began

packing the punters in. Within a month, the membership list of the club exceeded its physical capacity by a factor of four. People started making what could almost be described as a pilgrimage to Ealing. Part of the reason for this pilgrimage was a club policy to allow the enthusiastic and untried a spot on stage. Amongst those who took advantage of this policy were Eric Burdon (later to become famous as frontman of Newcastle combo The Animals), Paul Pond (who later became Paul Jones, singer with Manfred Mann) and one **Brian Jones** – Elmo Lewis as he was styling himself on the evening in April 1962 when Mick and Keith first clapped eyes on him onstage playing slide guitar in the style of his hero Elmore James, whose skill in that capacity had prompted the *nom de guerre*. Jagger and Richards approached the diminutive but extraordinarily handsome Jones after his performance. When Jones told them of his musical tastes in his upper middle-class accent, it turned out – notwithstanding the R&B-alluding pseudonym – that he was actually more into jazz than Jagger and Richards. The latter started turning him on to the likes of other R&B merchants like **Bo Diddley** and **Jimmy Reed**.

Also more jazz-oriented was one Charlie Watts, a poker-faced but agreeable drummer who could frequently be seen at the club. More boogie woogie-oriented was pianist **Ian Stewart** – universally known as 'Stu' – whose notably lantern-jawed face and gruff-but-lovable persona were also often in attendance. Like Jagger, Watts would sometimes 'sit in'

with Blues Incorporated. In Jagger's case, this involved singing three songs on Saturdays in the Ealing Club and three at the **Marquee Jazz Club** in Soho, where Korner's band had secured a Thursday night residency. When Jagger's recruitment was mentioned in mainstream music magazine *Disc*, the first step had been taken towards Jagger becoming one of the world's most famous men. The first steps were also in motion towards his becoming the ultimate rock frontman of all: observers have recalled him showing unusual stage extrovertism at this juncture in the way he would shake his head around onstage.

Interestingly, despite Eva Jagger's misgivings about her son beginning to take playing R&B a little too seriously for her liking upon Richards' arrival, Richards himself later stated that it was the arrival into their circle of Jones that provided the impetus to create what he termed "a real band". The first public performance by a band billing themselves as **The Rolling Stones** occurred on 12 July 1962 at the Marquee. The event had come about because Blues Incorporated had been offered the accolade of a BBC radio broadcast on the programme *Jazz Club*. Unfortunately, though the group boasted seven members, the BBC



Jagger fronting Cyril Davies' All-Stars at the Ealing Club, 1962. From left, Dave Stevens, Dick Heckstall-Smith, Alexis Korner, Jack Bruce, MJ and Cyril Davies on mouth harp.

would only agree to pay for six. Korner good-naturedly told Jagger that they would turn down the gig. Jagger insisted they go ahead with it, reasoning that the extra publicity would bring more punters into the clubs for subsequent shows. Jagger has over the years been proven to be a very astute/manipulative (delete as per moral standard) individual and it may be the case that he was aware of just what an opportunity the absence of Blues Incorporated would constitute. Specifically, Jagger got to sing an entire set's worth of songs as The Rolling Stones played the support slot to a band fronted by Long John Baldry. The Stones that momentous night consisted of Jagger on vocals, Richards and Jones (still insisting on being known as Elmo Lewis) on guitars, Dick Taylor on bass, Ian Stewart on piano and future Kinks member Mick Avory on drums.

The handle of this *ad hoc* group would come to seem a superbly apposite one to the wider world as it became incrementally more well known. 'Rolling' naturally had a poetic appropriateness for its connection to rock (although a still R&B-purist minded Jagger did say to *Jazz News* at the time, "I hope they don't think



we're a rock'n'roll outfit"). It also created inevitable endless punning headlines and media slogans centred on the old proverb "A rolling stone gathers no moss", most of them contrived or meaningless but some of them – when applied to the image they acquired of restless young men anxious to kick over the traces – highly appropriate. It also lent itself to chicdom-granting abbreviation: there was something naturally cool-sounding about referring to them as simply "the Stones". Later, as the band got older than anyone ever conceived anybody continuing to make rock music would or should (i.e. over thirty), the name was prone to slightly contemptuous punning

("the Strolling Bones", the "Groaning Bones"). All of which makes it remarkable that the name was not borne of inspiration but of what Richards describes as "panic". Brian Jones was on the phone informing *Jazz News* of the first gig and was stumped when asked the name of the band: they hadn't decided on one at this point. Richards says that Brian got the name Rolling Stones from 'Rolling Stone Blues' by Muddy Waters, a legend that has become accepted as fact. Jagger's friend Dave Godin, however, was there when the name

10 Stones Myths

10 STONES MYTHS

A band that has had as long and as colourful a career as the Stones will have accrued their fair share of stories, myths and legends. Here are ten of the erroneous (or are they?) stories surrounding the band.

1. THE MARS BAR INCIDENT

The 1967 drugs trial of Jagger and Richards gave the popular press a field day of scandal (supposed role models taking drugs) and sex (surrounded by men, a mystery woman was wearing only a rug). However, the most salacious gossip emanating from the trial did not see print, but instead was a true underground rumour, passed by word of mouth until virtually everyone in Britain had heard of it. This was that, when the police burst in that fateful night, they had found Jagger eating a Mars bar from the vagina of Marianne Faithfull (who was the woman in the rug but referred to only as ‘Miss X’ in press reports). Faithfull herself has denied it. Though Faithfull sometimes seems confused about details (in her autobiography she says *Let It Bleed* is her favourite Stones album and then proceeds to cite tracks from that and *Beggar’s Banquet* and *Sticky Fingers*), she is hardly one to be anything less than candid about events. Even Tony Sanchez – whose book is a mine of dirt about the group – says it didn’t happen. He wrote that, at the Jagger and Richards trial, “in a bar during a lunch break, two senior police officers gulped

down bottles of beer with crime reporters and sniggeringly told “lewd and grossly exaggerated stories about Marianne’s behaviour at the time of the raid... and a totally false and malicious rumour was begun which Marianne has never quite managed to live down.”

2. THE KEITH RICHARDS BLOOD TRANSFUSION RUMOUR

Whereas Tony Sanchez did much to scotch the Mars Bar rumour, he was chiefly responsible for the legend that, in 1973, Richards – anxious to be ‘clean’ for an upcoming tour but unable to take the time to wean himself off smack – undertook a little-known rich addict’s cure involving the wholesale replacement of his blood with that provided by a donor or donors. It’s been repeated over and over in newspapers since whenever the Stones are touring and some juicy copy is required. Harry Shapiro of the charity Drugscope says, “It’s rubbish. Drugs like heroin and coke wash out of the system in 24–48 hours. Detoxifying is not that much of a problem so long as you can deal with the withdrawals – it’s staying off that is the issue – and that needs therapy, not a blood transfusion.” Richards himself has also denied it. And yet... there is something convincing about the way Sanchez relates the story in his book, explaining that Marshall Chess – who had apparently taken the ‘cure’ before – told Richards of it, going into detail about the doctor who arranged it, the Swiss clinic at which it supposedly took place, the cost,

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