THE ROLLING STONES

Recording years	Main genre	Music sample
1963–2016	Classic rhythm'n'blues	Midnight Rambler (1970)

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THE ROLLING STONES*

Album released:	V	A	L	U	E	More info:
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Tracks: 1) Not Fade Away; 2) (Get Your Kicks On) Route 66; 3) I Just Want To Make Love To You; 4) Honest I Do; 5) Now I've Got A Witness; 6) Little By Little; 7) I'm A King Bee; 8) Carol; 9) Tell Me (You're Coming Back To Me); 10) Can I Get A Witness; 11) You Can Make It If You Try; 12) Walking The Dog.

REVIEW

"What's the point of listening to us doing 'I'm A King Bee' when you can hear Slim Harpo doing it?", Mick Jagger once famously remarked — long after the Rolling Stones had mastered the art of writing their own material, of course; had he humbly and honestly made this rhetorical statement, say, in early 1964, it could have gone a long way in ruining the band's promotional campaign so meticulously constructed by Andrew Loog Oldham. But now that we are neck-deep in the 21st century, when both Slim Harpo's original from 1957 and the Stones' cover of it from 1964 have all but merged in the same time dimension... as much admiration as I have for James Isaac Moore of Lobdell, Louisiana, I think that today «the point» is quite self-evident.

* For personal convenience' sake, in these reviews I follow the Rolling Stones' 1964–67 original American catalog rather than the smaller UK one. This particular album in the US was subtitled *England's Newest Hit Makers* (the UK sleeve was a plain photo with no wording at all) and started out with the Stones' latest hit single, 'Not Fade Away', replacing a cover of Bo Diddley's 'Mona' in the UK version. Subsequent differences between US and UK albums would be much larger.

Much too much silliness, a lot of it motivated by theoretical ideology rather than genuine heartfelt reactions, has permeated discourse on the «soulless whiteboy blues imitation» of the British Invasion. Occasionally, there is a grain of truth to it, depending on the level of talent, immersion, and technique of the artist in question: as with every fad and trend, there were plenty of second- and third-rate imitators in the early Sixties, just as there are hacks and phoneys in any sphere at any given time period. But when we talk about bands like the Rolling Stones, any such dismissive theoretization becomes utterly misguided. It only takes a bare minimum of comparison to understand that, while the early Stones did indeed mostly cover their overseas idols rather than write their own songs, already from the very beginning they exercised a personal and creative approach to these covers — in a way, even more creative than the Beatles, which might actually have been one of the reasons why it took them so much longer to overcome their shyness and begin writing original songs on a regular basis. In other words, it is possible that they did not feel such a pressing need to write their own songs simply because they were quite happy about how successfully they managed to reinvent and «expropriate» songs by other people.

As an example, take the aforementioned slow electric blues of 'I'm A King Bee', play it back to back with Harpo's original and then make an honest decision about which of the two you would like to leave in your collection if, for some reason, you could not have both. The first thing you would probably notice is the production: naturally, the 1964 standards of Regent Studios in London make all the instruments sound sharper and clearer than the 1957 standards in Nashville (by the way, I innocently used to think it was a Chicago song, like most of Fifties' electric blues, but turns out that Slim never even made it as far as Chicago). However, admittedly this is but an inevitable technical advantage. Much more importantly, the Stones were not content on simply playing the song note-for-note, but were determined to capitalize on its potential — potential that was immanently present there from the very beginning, yet never properly explored by the author.

Thus, for instance, not only does Bill Wyman nail the «buzzing» bass zoop of the song so that it sounds subtler more menacing than the original, but during the instrumental break, after Mick's cocky and inciting "well, buzz awhile!..", he actually obeys and delivers a fun little buzzing solo (the original tune just went along with the zoops — same thing as the verse without the vocals). And then, the «Sting it babe!...» bit — where Harpo delivered a few limpy «stinging» notes, Brian Jones went on to make his guitar sound like an angry hive going wild on your ass, in one of the most imaginative mini-solos he had ever devised. This is not even mentioning the little extra guitar sting Brian makes every few bars in direct response to Bill's bass zoops, maintaining that dangerous hive-like atmosphere for the entire duration of the song — where very, very little about Harpo's original actually made you feel surrounded and overwhelmed by miriads of dangerous insects.

All right, shall you say, but what about the vocals? Surely an authentic bluesman from the Louisiana region will sound more authoritative and convincing than a snotty 21-year old Dartford kid who had never even seen the Delta, let alone directly experienced the experience? But yet again, this logic is only valid if we work from the assumption that Mick Jagger wanted to sound exactly like Slim Harpo, and that the idea was to give a credible impression of African-American sexual power as conveyed through blues music. If, however, we work from the assumption that African-American blues music was simply chosen as a starting medium for venting the suppressed sexuality of young British kids... well, in that case I will just have to state that Mick Jagger is far more successful here at accomplishing his own personal goal than Mr. Harpo was at accomplishing his — simply because *nobody* in the Great Britain of 1964 sounded quite like Mick Jagger. Not a single frickin' soul, and that's the God's truth.

I mean, I keep running these rowdy young boys of that time period through my mind, one by one — Eric Burdon, Roger Daltrey, Paul Jones, Keith Relf, Phil May, never mind any of the Beatles at all in this category — and there is literally nobody who could even begin to approach Jagger in terms of that certain «aggressive mystique» in his singing (and not just singing — his harp playing was fully attuned to the same mystique as well). Mick wasn't much of a burly belter — more of a midnight rambler, sounding razor-sharp and sneeringly cocky at the same time, like pop music's equivalent of some deadly, yet impossibly charismatic villain from some contemporary TV show or comic series. And while half a century later it is all very well for us to smile at the «dangerous» image that was so carefully constructed by him (and *for* him) in 1964, the fact is that this here 'King Bee' *did* sound as dangerous as possible in the context of early Sixties' popular entertainment. Never mind the calculated promotion, the darkened photos, the staged «offensive behaviour»: above everything else, the Rolling Stones were felt as «dangerous» in 1964 because their *music* sounded dangerous, far more so than the Beatles.

And speaking of the Beatles, here comes another comparison. Unlike its doctored American counterpart, the self-titled UK version of this album opened with the (also heavily reinvented) cover of Chuck Berry's cover of Bobby Troup's '(Get Your Kicks On) Route 66' — a basic three-chord rocker which sounds not entirely unlike the Beatles' 'I Saw Her Standing There' if you reduce both to bare-bone structures. Both songs serve as kick-ass energetic openers to capture your attention and devotion from the get-go. But the Beatles use the energy of rock'n'roll to stimulate over-the-top joy and exuberance of a burgeoning teenager — the Stones, on the other hand, use it as a fashionable, yet barely understood voodoo mechanism. The song, which used to be a fairly innocent ode to the wonders of U.S. highway travel in the days of Nat King Cole, and was still quite happy sounding even in its Chuck Berry incarnation, is here transformed into a mystical ritual: Jagger lists all these unknown, enigmatic words like "Amarillo", "Gallup, New Mexico", and "Flagstaff, Arizona" as if they were part of

some black magic incantation (surely they couldn't sound any different from the proverbial abracadabra for him at the time?), and even though their drug-drenched days were still years away from the boys at the time, the line "would you get hip to this kindly tip, and take that California trip" sounds positively stoned in this context.

It does not hurt, either, that in early '64 the Stones emerged on the scene as easily *the* tightest of all nascent British bands, period. Again, listen to the way they play 'Route 66' and 'Carol' in the context of the time — nobody in 1964 played with quite the same combination of speed, tightness, and mean, lean, focused energy. One of the biggest mysteries that I have never managed to figure out is how exactly they got their rhythm section to sound that way: with Charlie Watts' predominantly jazz-based interests and with Bill Wyman being older than most of the rest by a good nine years (and having previously played with comparatively «tepid» outfits such as the London-based Cliftons), it would seem at first like a fairly suspicious match with their wild pair of guitarists — but from the very first seconds of 'Route 66', it is clear that everybody gels in perfectly, and that Bill and Charlie are only too happy to provide Keith and Brian with the tightest, fastest, grittiest «bottom» that was at all possible in 1964. Additionally, Mick proves himself to be a master of the harmonica, avoiding technical stunts or wild power-puffs (for which he lacked extensive training anyway) and making it, instead, into a melodic extension of his own voice ('I'm A King Bee' and Jimmy Reed's 'Honest I Do' are the best examples).

Much like the Beatles, the Stones from the very start showed clear disdain for the idea of LP-only filler — almost every single track here smells of creativity and excitement. So, for 'I Just Want To Make Love To You' it was clear that they could hardly replicate the Olympian swagger of physical love god Muddy Waters — instead, they sped the thing up to an insane tempo that even put Bo Diddley to shame and subjected their soon-to-be teenage girl fans to the lose-your-head breakneck fury of a young and strong team of British rock studs. For 'Honest I Do', Jagger knew it was useless to replicate the famous «toothless» voice of Jimmy Reed, so he went for a more Europeanized, Don Juan-style delivery: you know he absolutely does not mean it when he sings "I'll never place no one above you", certainly not after following it up with the wolf-whistle harmonica solo, but is that reason enough to shy away from a lying-and-cheating one-night stand? For the album-closing Rufus Thomas' 'Walking The Dog', the band pulls out all the stops, with the sneeriest, nastiest vocal performance possible and Keith blasting away on that solo as if his life, freedom, and an upcoming 20-year heroin supply all depended on it.

Sure enough, I like and/or respect all the original performances of these songs; but they were never as openly defiant as what the Stones manage to turn them into — and if you do not feel that quantum difference in your bones, you will most likely be unable to grasp the essence of this band, not even after formally swearing your allegiance to the likes of **Sticky**

Fingers or **Exile On Main St**. because these records are «supposed» to be so great and all. And while this kind of arrogant youthful defiance would be recreated over several subsequent generations of artists, the Stones in 1964 had the advantage of playing it *cool*: unlike, say, Aerosmith a decade later, they did not possess the means to generate excessive dramatization (frenzied guitar pyrotechnics, wild screechy vocalist, crude sex-dripping lyrics, etc.) and still had to exude that aura of nastiness from a somewhat «gentlemanly» platform, dabbling in musical eroticism rather than having permission to dive headfirst into the ocean of musical pornography. (Not that I have anything against well-done musical pornography, mind you, but well-done musical eroticism usually requires more talent).

Where the band does slightly fail is with material which they do *not* manage to fully drag over to the dark side — the most notable of these failures probably being Marvin Gaye's 'Can I Get A Witness': an okay cover, I guess, but Jagger is trying too hard to simply get us up on our feet and dance, without finding himself some extra function which was not already there in Marvin's original; and as an «R&B singer without a back thought», it is clear that the man does not hold his own against seasoned pros. (In fact, I am far more sympathetic towards the instrumental extension of this song — 'Now I've Got A Witness' features top-notch harmonica solos and another masterful guitar break from Keith). 'You Can Make It If You Try', originally done by Gene Allison but probably heard by the Stones in the more recent Solomon Burke version, is another duffer candidate, although Mick's vocal here commands more respect than it does on 'Witness' — replacing soul with swagger, it still somehow manages to give you an uplifting kick.

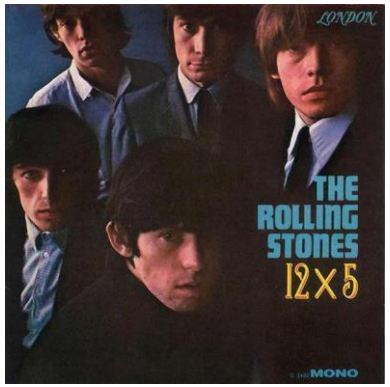
The album contained but one original, the romantic ballad 'Tell Me', and it always amused me that the «proverbially evil» Stones would have a tender, sentimental pop ballad (albeit a tragic one) as their introduction to the world of songwriters' royalty (and royal*ties*) — but I'll be damned if it ain't quite a fine-written song for the 'From Me To You' era, with the boys already mastering the art of build-up (tender verse to alarmed bridge to desperate chorus) and, curiously, going well over the typical three-minute barrier, as if they got carried away with their own success. It also set a common standard for them: in the future, the typical Stones ballad would be a bitter lament rather than a serenade, helping to lessen the gap between their rocky swagger and their sentimental side. In any case, 'Tell Me' is a respectable keeper, rather than forgettable fluff, and it's kind of a pity that they buried it once and for all in their live set after 1965 (honestly, they wrote quite a few worse clunkers in the balladry department after that).

In short, remember this, kids of the future: there were only *two* artists in 1964 (as opposed to, for instance, more than *forty* in 2020) to top the UK LP charts — the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, and if you fail to understand how the artistic

creativity of **A Hard Day's Night** could be regarded on a comparable level with the «slavish blues and rock'n'roll covers» of **The Rolling Stones**, then just chalk this up to the sorrowful consequences of how the Stones' manager Andrew Loog Oldham and his team were able to dupe the British public with their titillation-based promotional campaign. (Then again, there are also those who think that Brian Epstein not only made the Beatles, but basically *was* the Beatles, as far as their popularity and influence are concerned). But I myself have never subscribed to that conspirologist opinion, and as time goes by, the awesomeness of the fresh, young, nasty, swaggery Stones only becomes more and more clear to me even against the ever-expanding musical horizons.

Discography note: There are quite a few early Stones classics around this period which managed to avoid early LP release. The band's first single, a cover of Chuck Berry's 'Come On' from June '63, already has the Stones as a super-tight unit, but misses the magical transformation of Chuck's vibe from fun-and-cute to fun-and-nasty. The second single, featuring the Lennon-McCartney composition 'I Wanna Be Your Man' specially written for the Stones, was released in November '63 and is a minor classic — the band's first rip-roaring performance whose vocals and guitars simply ooze nastiness (especially when compared to the much more mild Ringo-sung version on **With The Beatles**), and the B-side 'Stoned' is a pretty evil take on Booker T & The MG's 'Green Onions'. The third single was an also nastified cover of Buddy Holly's 'Not Fade Away' (it is included on the US version of the album). Additionally, there was an early EP from January '64, also called **The Rolling Stones** but somewhat expendable (four covers, none of them particularly great).

If you do want to truly dig deep, though, seek out bootlegged versions of some of the outtakes from the recording sessions for the LP — in particular, the instrumental jam 'And Mr. Spector And Mr. Pitney Came Too' (because they did), basically an extension of 'Little By Little' from the album with frantic soloing from Mick on harmonica and Keith on lead guitar; and the infamous 'Andrew's Blues', a drunken improvisation to the melody of 'Can I Get A Witness' which happens to celebrate the spirit of Andrew Loog Oldham in the most appropriate manner ("Andrew Oldham sittin' on a hill with Jack and Jill, fucked all night and sucked all night and taste that pussy till it taste just right" — I keep thinking of a parallel universe in which they accidentally mixed up the tapes and sprang this on the public market instead of the actual 'Witness' and I still cannot properly model the consequences). Bet you don't get *that* kind of language from digging through the Beatles' Abbey Road Studios outtakes, do you?



12 x 5

Album released:	V	A	L	U	E	More info:
Oct. 17, 1964	3	3	3	3	3	

Tracks: 1) Around And Around; 2) Confessin' The Blues; 3) Empty Heart; 4) Time Is On My Side; 5) Good Times, Bad Times; 6) It's All Over Now; 7) 2120 South Michigan Avenue; 8) Under The Boardwalk; 9) Congratulations; 10) Grown Up Wrong; 11) If You Need Me; 12) Susie Q.

REVIEW

While the UK only saw one Rolling Stones LP in the year that Beatlemania took over the world, the Americans, freshly subscribed to the thrills of British Invasion, got luckier and received this mega-pack of 12 extra songs where the British side got only five — the EP **Five By Five**, released on the 14th of August, did indeed contain five new recordings from five band members. In the States, it became **12 x 5**; padded out with several more A- and B-sides from recent singles and a few tracks recorded exclusively for the American market, it came out two months later as (questionable) proof that the Rolling Stones could now easily compete with the Fab Four at least in terms of quantity, if not necessarily in quality.

If one accepts **12 x 5** as a legitimate second LP from the band, it might seem, indeed, that the proverbial «sophomore slump» is in full flight, since there are few, if any at all, surprises in store for us. For the most part, the recordings present the same cocktail of Chicago blues, Chuck Berry-style rock'n'roll, contemporary soul-oriented R&B, and one or two half-assed stabs at original songwriting — all of it competent, but not yet suggestive of an individual artistic path leading from interpretation to creation. And now that the novelty shock from the band's first major statement earlier in the year had

worn down, it was not that easy, either, to take the world anew by surprise at the phenomenon of the Rolling Stones as a darker and seedier alternative to the smiling «moptops». Predictably, of all the early Stones' albums, **12 x 5** typically gets the worst rap in retrospective reviews (with the possible exception of **December's Children**, a record that suffers even more from being scraped together from various leftovers).

Were one only to concentrate on the band's output in terms of singles at the time, the awesome stylistic and substantial progression made by the guys from early to late 1964 would be impossible to miss. In June, they had their first proper #1 UK hit with 'It's All Over Now', a song they got from Bobby Womack and his band, the Valentinos. The original was a fun little tune, melodically lifted almost note-for-note from Chuck Berry's 'Memphis Tennessee' — but seriously distinguished, of course, by a tense and nasty vocal performance from Bobby. Naturally, Mick Jagger could never compete with Bobby Womack on a technical level, but, much to his honor, he never even tried. Instead, what he *did* try is to take the bitch-slappin' potential of the vocals to a whole new level: each verse is shot out at you in one unfaltering timbral wave, like a revved-up prosecutor's speech keeping the jury on the edge of their seats. Bobby sings the song like a man who was unjustly injured, writhing in figurative pain while getting the lyrics out; Mick throws them out like a set of sneering, mocking, condescending insults, asserting his hip-and-ironic superiority over his antagonist, his listeners, his audience, God almighty and whoever else might trod along. It's naughty, insulting, offensive... and oddly *hot*.

Even more importantly, though, is the fact that the Stones did not merely «cover» the song. Instead, they re-wrote it from scratch; I would argue that they quite properly deserved their own songwriting credit here. There are no signs whatsoever of 'Memphis Tennessee', other than the basic rhythm pattern; instead, it introduces a completely new little blues-pop riff which is later emphasized by an unforgettable set of power chords echoing Jagger's chorus of "because I USED to love her, BUT it's all over NOW...". Nobody would demand that kind of creativity from a cover tune, but the Stones still went ahead and displayed it: it is within 'It's All Over Now' that you should properly look for the true seeds of the Stones' masterful blues-rock songwriting.

The icing on the cake is provided by Keith's inspirational, most likely improvised, chopped-up, sputtering, stuttering solo break which came absolutely from nowhere (nothing even remotely like it on the Valentinos' original) — and it has always been a deep suspicion in me that it directly inspired Dave Davies for his own punkish solo on 'You Really Got Me', recorded just a few weeks after 'It's All Over Now' hit the UK market — thus, we get ourselves yet another legitimate contender for «first punk song ever» (and it still breaks my heart how Keith had completely abandoned / forgotten that particular style of

lead guitar playing some time in between the Brian Jones and Mick Taylor periods). Finally, one more cool thing about 'It's All Over Now' is its extended instrumental coda, bringing the length well over three minutes and sounding unusually repetitive-and-noisy for a pop single in 1964. Maybe they just thought that little power chord sequence was fun to drop down on the listeners several times in a row — and, incidentally, came up with a sort of proto-Velvet Underground vibe (which, I guess, is something worth taking into consideration for all the Velvet Underground fans who despise the likes of the Stones for their commercial orientation and musical predictability).

'It's All Over Now' did not make that much of an impact on the US charts, but the band's next, US-only single did: the cover of Jerry Ragovoy's 'Time Is On My Side', which the band certainly lifted from a recent B-side by soul queen Irma Thomas, rose all the way to #6, for the first time putting them into the Top 10 and becoming their greatest commercial success on that market prior to 'Satisfaction' — rather odd, considering that the song has little to do with rock'n'roll, and that when it came to soul music, the Stones did not have such a surefire formula to make it more crispy, exciting, and modern than they did with their reinterpretations of Chuck Berry or Jimmy Reed. In this particular case, for instance, I cannot say that their cover is in any way «better» than Irma's version — tighter, perhaps, and Mick manages to give a convincing performance, but he is nowhere near the spiritual belter that Irma Thomas is. Ironically, 'Time Is On My Side' would only gradually become a fundamentally important piece of the Stones' legacy, as time went on and on and on and it became obvious that time was, very much indeed, on their side (something that they did not forget to exploit themselves when they revived the song for their 1981-82 stadium tour).

(Two trivia notes — first, check out the very first recording of this song, made by the jazz trombonist Kai Winding with Dionne and Dee Dee Warwick on backing vocals, it is every bit as inspirational as both Irma's and the Stones'; second, remember that the Stones actually made two versions of the song — the one on the US single and on **12 x 5** features a little gospel organ intro, while the version later included on the UK LP **The Rolling Stones No. 2** includes a stinging guitar lead instead. So, which one's the better one? let us try our best and make half of the planet kill the other half over this burning issue!)

The core of **12 x 5**, constituted of songs that were earlier released on the **Five By Five** EP in the UK, was recorded in June '64 at the exact same location where they also did 'It's All Over Now' — Chess Studios at Chicago, the Stones' spiritual equivalent of King Solomon's Temple. This is why one of the original tracks, the instrumental '2120 South Michigan Avenue', bears that particular name — the address of Chess Studios. It is, however, notable that the location mainly served

to provide inspiration — none of Chess' regulars appear as session musicians on any of the tracks, either because the Stones were too humble and shy to ask, or too proud to require outside assistance even from any of their idols, or, heck, maybe both at the same time. In any case, while there are no great stylistic or substantial breakthroughs contained in these tracks, they most certainly prove that these five (six, if we count Ian Stewart on keyboards, and we should) British lads could waltz inside the single greatest American blues studio of all time and make music that was 100% worthy of all the illustrious names associated with the place.

The very first two tracks on **12 x 5** show that the boys are here to stay and conquer. 'Around And Around', taken over from Chuck Berry, is merry barroom rock that was sort of lacking on **Newest Hitmakers**, and not only does it signal the true arrival of Ian Stewart as a boogie piano player to rival Jonnie Johnson and Jerry Lee Lewis (even if, unlike those two, he *always* humbly keeps to the background — I do not think there is even a single Ian Stewart piano solo on any of the Stones' albums), but it also firmly establishes Keith as *the* unquestionable inheritor and perfector of the Chuck Berry lick — unlike Chuck, Keith is no big fan of showing off, but every note that he plays sounds nastier, grittier, and, in a way, more fully and decisively realized than the way it was played by Chuck. The most important element is still Jagger, though — with his vocal strategy, the cycled "but we kept on rockin', goin' 'round and 'round..." bit becomes more overtly rebellious with each new repetition, a barely veiled call to rip out theater seats and go full-out riot mode, even if the song starts out as just an innocent piece of good-time boogie. Every time I play the original and the cover back-to-back, Chuck's version merely makes me want to dance — the Stones' version, in comparison, makes me want to storm the Bastille or something. (For the record, the Animals' version, released the same year, was also injected with exuberance rather than insurgence — mainly because neither Eric Burdon, nor Alan Price ever strived for the sort of provocative nastiness that was a common feature shared between Mick and Keith).

The other highlight, quite different in terms of genre and style, but not so much in the desired effect, is 'Confessin' The Blues', an old blues tune which Chuck Berry also recorded back in 1960, but in this particular case the Stones rather take as their model the slower, steadier version done by Little Walter in 1958. On here, Mick goes into his trademark full-out «midnight rambler» mode, with both guitarists supporting him as grimly and snappily as possible. One could complain that Jagger's singing is somewhat strained and unnatural, but this is precisely what makes the song so enticing: both Chuck *and* Little Walter sang those verses with their usual ease and fluidity, making their vocal efforts unremarkable against the background of everything else they did — Mick Jagger, however, was there to make a sharp difference which would be sure to grab your personal attention. The tense shrillness of his vocals is sharpened and polished to near-geometric perfection,

and he had this unique way of emphasizing specific lines with a high-pressure glottalized burst ("oh, baby... can I ha-a-a-ve you for myself?") that would have been considered not just offensive, but dang near-criminal just a decade earlier. It is a marvel to listen to him zipping between different vocal styles, transforming a potentially deadly dull 12-bar blues into a journey of devilish seduction which, at times, sounds downright creepy (and, of course, utterly unimaginable in the cultural context of the 2010s-2020s). Even the harmonica break, which cannot compare to Little Walter in terms of technique, beats Walter in terms of efficiency — with its echoey production, steady pacing, and swaggery, threatening feel of confidence, it just seems like a natural, if not *super*natural, extension of Jagger's hypnotic powers. In short, when placed in the hands of the Stones, 'Confessin' The Blues' is not a love song, not even a stalker's monolog — it is our friend the Devil himself, who came here on Earth because he would rather love *you*, baby, than anyone else he knows in town. (Six years later, he would be making another, even more direct, proposal, singing "my name is Lucifer, please take my hand" through the vocal cords of yet another crazy Englishman — although by that time, he would seem to be more honest about this, hinting to you at eternal damnation and desperation rather than at those sexy, seductive flames of hell).

These are the big ones in my opinion, but there's quite a bit of fun to be extracted from some of the smaller ones as well. One might argue that the Stones have very little business covering the Drifters, but I have always loved the tightness of the groove they get going on 'Under The Boardwalk', and how even on this superficially very happy song they still manage to introduce an odd strain of darkness — the vibe of those deep "under the boardwalk, under the boardwalk..." backing vocals is anything *but* joyful, sounding more like the voices of all the spirits of those unfortunate enough to drown somewhere in the vicinity of the boardwalk, just as the unsuspecting happy couple are enjoying their safe and sunny day out. (Cue the *Jaws* theme or something here).

Though much less surprising, Solomon Burke's 'If You Need Me' is given as strong a Jagger-jolt as 'You Can Make It If You Try' — no tenderness whatsoever (Jagger's "if you need me, why don't you call me?" = "if you need me, *bitch*, just call me instead of having a nervous breakdown and making me pay your medical bills!"), but a lot of fabulous glottal contortions weaving an attitude of superhuman cockiness and absolute self-assurance from somebody to whom «vulnerability» probably means the chance to catch one too many STDs. (Do not be too harsh on a lad who'd only just turned 21: over time, he would eventually achieve great success in exploring his sensitive side as well).

Even the abovementioned instrumental jam '2120 South Michigan Avenue' has its moments of greatness — like when all the instruments quiet down for a few bars, creating an atmosphere of suspense, and then Jagger's harmonica blasts start

raining down from the sky with little warning. Of note is also the nasty fuzzy tone on Wyman's bass, bringing the tune quite close to the requirements of classic hard rock (or, at least, «proto»-hard rock), and the funny dialog effect between the chugging chords of the rhythm guitar and Ian Stewart's quietly mumbling organ solo. (Fans should also note that the latest remaster of the album restores an extra minute and a half of the jam with a long-lost guitar break from Keith, although it is hardly anything special). And while the definitive Sixties' rock cover of 'Susie Q' still had to wait for John Fogerty to mature, this short and super-tight blast is no slouch, either: the boys bale out all the swamp from Dale Hawkins' original and replace it with nasty, dirty, distorted rock'n'roll fury — this is easily the single best *group* performance on the album, with everybody giving their best, Bill and Charlie almost owning the result with fairly psychedelic bass «zoops» from the former and near-tribal drumming from the latter.

In the meantime, the number of original compositions has increased drastically — counting both Jagger/Richards *and* the «Nanker Phelge» moniker, there's five, of which 'Empty Heart', a pleading, brooding R&B number with interlocking guitar, organ, and harmonica parts, is arguably the best: most of the time it isn't even so much of an actual song as it is more of a shamanistic ceremony, a multi-layered magical incantation to rekindle a lady's passion for the broken-hearted protagonist. 'Grown Up Wrong', a rather thin one-line guitar vamp, and 'Good Times Bad Times', an acoustic blues-pop ballad, are less impressive, but the former is notable for being the very first (out of many more to follow) classic Jagger putdown of a girl for acting all stuffy and conformist ("you were easy to fool when you were in school, but you've grown up all wrong"), and the latter at least features the best harmonica break on the record (the lyrics are total crap, though: lines like "there's gotta be trust in this world / or it won't get very far / well trust in someone / or there's gonna be war" should be considered an insult to Dartford Grammar School, never mind the London School of Economics).

My favorite of the originals, however, is the slow-waltzing 'Congratulations' — sort of an early precursor to the band's baroque pop flirt in the mid-Sixties with its inventive interlocking of two rippling guitar patterns, with the electric part coming in with a little delay after the acoustic part, as if chasing it away. This is the kind of interplay that you did not see all that often even on a Beatles record, and clearly showed that here, too, was a band with some major composing potential. The lyrics aren't too good, the vocals aren't Jagger at his finest (sadness and sentimentalism are not his forte, at least not just yet), but that guitar work, including the dark folksy acoustic solo break, is absolutely exquisite for 1964.

In the end, everything has to be judged in the context of its time, and while **12 x 5** might seem weak by «common» standards applicable to the Stones, and not tremendously innovative to be able to catch up with the Beatles, it is still a

major achievement compared to the rates and peculiarities of evolution of almost any other British Invasion band at the time. The lack of giant strides here is compensated by the presence of small creative steps taken in pretty much every direction — arrangements, production, reinvention of other people's songs, and nurturing of the band's own songwriting craft. Above all, it would be impossible to hear this collection in 1964 and *not* realize that, much like the Beatles, these guys were here to stay — though, of course, it would still be impossible to realize just for how much longer than the Beatles they would be staying...

THE ROLLING STONES, NOW!

Album released:	V	A	L	U	E	More info:
Feb. 13, 1965	3	3	3	3	3	

Tracks: 1) Everybody Needs Somebody To Love; 2) Down Home Girl; 3) You Can't Catch Me; 4) Heart Of Stone; 5) What A Shame; 6) Mona (I Need You Baby); 7) Down The Road Apiece; 8) Off The Hook; 9) Pain In My Heart; 10) Oh Baby (We Got A Good Thing Going); 11) Little Red Rooster; 12) Surprise, Surprise.

REVIEW

Issued hot on the heels of the band's second UK LP (rather unimaginatively titled **The Rolling Stones No. 2** and even less imaginatively, and quite confusingly, sharing the same cover photo with **12 x 5**), the US-only LP **The Rolling Stones, Now!** is quite similar to its UK counterpart, except that it omits those songs which had already been issued on **12 x 5** and replaces them either with older material (Bo Diddley's 'Mona', formerly deleted from **Newest Hitmakers** in favor of 'Not Fade Away'), or newer material ('Oh Baby' and 'Heart Of Stone', which in the UK would only make it to the next album, **Out Of Our Heads**), with at least one song fully exclusive to the American market ('Surprise, Surprise').

Once we got that all sorted out, the situation is tolerable, except for two gripes. First, in the process the American catalog somehow managed to lose hold of an excellent cover of Muddy Waters' 'I Can't Be Satisfied' (pity, since it features a fine sample of Brian's slide playing in full-on Delta mode), and second, there are actually *two* versions of Solomon Burke's

'Everybody Needs Somebody To Love' out there — the original three-minute demo, released by mistake on **Now!**, and the longer, officially sanctioned, five-minute finalized version on **No. 2**. Subsequent CD pressings of **Now!** corrected that mistake and swapped the short demo for the long master take, but here's the funny thing: I actually like the demo far more than the master take — the latter rather loyally clings to the optimistic, party-spirit tone of the original, which I would rather accept from Solomon Burke in person; the former, however, is surprisingly darker, more echo-laden, stuffed with weird ghostly vocal harmonies and tense, aggressive micro-breaks from Keith's electric guitar, basically feeling like a special Halloween version or something. They probably thought that such darkness clashes unfavorably with the cheer-up message of the song, but to me, the demo version has always seemed to fit in much better with the delicious nastiness of the ensuing tracks — so I would advise you to be tenacious and track down the «mistaken» three-minute version, which isn't that hard to do in the digital age anyway.

Anyway, confusing details aside, **Now!** is a fairly accurate reflection of what the Stones were all about in early '65 — still only just beginning to cut their own songwriters' teeth, but continuing to polish and deepen their atmospheric qualities by reinventing other people's classics in new, exciting ways. On a song-by-song basis, this is arguably the best release of the early Stones period; for the rest of 1965, there would be a slight dip in LP quality, as records would become more and more populated with early Jagger/Richards originals that still suffered from relative greenness, but **Now!** strikes a very good balance between proper covers, self-credited «rewrites» (new words for old tunes), and just a couple high quality true originals — and there's hardly even one unwise choice among the lot.

Soulful, chest-thumpin' R&B, one of the Stones' biggest loves at the time but also unquestionably their most vulnerable spot, is kept here to an absolute minimum — Allen Toussaint's / Otis Redding's 'Pain In My Heart' is the only track on the album that could be brushed off as an inferior imitation of a masterwork, but while I won't be defending Jagger's vocals (they're okay, but directly competing with Otis without trying to cheat is a no-no), the band still comes up with an inventive guitar-based rearrangement of the brass-based original, and Wyman's grim-fuzzy bass tone gives it a bit of a new face.

On the other hand, their intrusion onto slow Southern territory totally hits the jackpot. 'Down Home Girl' was a small local hit for Alvin Robinson, a grizzly-voiced New Orleanian singer-songwriter closely associated with Leiber and Stoller, the former of which co-wrote this sultry ode to a Louisiana mud queen with his friend Artie Butler. It is quite obligatory for any true music lover to seek out the original version (Robinson's vocal timbre truly sows the impression that he emerged from out of the depths of the bayou), but this is really a tune that Mick Jagger was simply born to sing, regardless of the fact that

he'd never even seen a proper "cotton field" before, let alone tried walking in one. The funniest thing about the song is that originally it was just humorous, not sarcastic — the girl in question is being *admired* for her down-to-earth nature, not put down or anything; the Stones, however, remake it as if the protagonist had this complicated attraction-and-condescension relationship for his passion. Honestly, this is one of those moments where even an outspoken defender of women's rights might want to put the feminist stance on pause and revel in the gleeful sneer of Jagger's voice, cleverly mimed by Brian's bottleneck triple-note «ha, ha, ha!» When it gets to the chorus, Robinson's drawn-out "oh, you're so, down home girl" is a prolonged howl of primal lust, but Jagger throws in the armor-piercing Wrench of Nastiness and scores a critical hit. You might want to take a shower, though, after exposing yourself to its full radiation potential.

As good as the band's covers of 'Carol' and 'Around And Around' used to be, **Now!** is also where they reach the top with their modernization of the Chuck Berry sound — for some reason, both 'You Can't Catch Me' and 'Down The Road Apiece' fell out of their live repertoire fairly early, but maybe they just couldn't live up on stage to the requested levels of speed and tightness shown here. As befits the title, 'You Can't Catch Me' zips along at the fastest speed they could get at the moment, with Bill and Charlie setting the frame for a performance that really imitates the spirit of a breathless car race — again, with much of Chuck's lightweight humor replaced by grim and gritty efficiency. There's that odd whiff of something dark and mysterious all over again, exemplified by... well, for instance, what's up with that weird «dripping» sound they add — that one lonely "*ping!*" coming in at regular intervals, like a water splash from a leaking faucet? I have no idea whose idea that was, or even what instrument is producing the effect, but it's goddamn weird — together with all the reverb, it makes the song sound as if it were recorded inside a jail cell. A song about fast-and-furious car racing inside a jail cell? See, bet you never knew just *how* weird these early Stones covers, so easily dismissed by the non-curious, can really get.

'Down The Road Apiece' is clearly less mysterious — an old roadhouse boogie that goes all the way back to the days of the great piano player Amos Milburn, but the Stones, naturally, are once again exploiting the Chuck Berry version, and, once again, are elevating it to a whole new level of excitement: not only is the production thicker and tenser, but Keith is given free reign in the studio, and he profits from that by extending the song by almost an entire minute, just so that he can demonstrate his complete mastery of every single Berry lick, which he glues together in a seamless sequence (the song only begins to fade away once he has exhausted the pool and begins repeating himself) and polishes to perfection; additionally, every once in a while he engages in call-and-response dialog with Ian Stewart, banging away like there was no tomorrow in the background — there is a clear feeling here that they are intentionally sweating to beat Master Berry and Master Johnson at their own game, and you know what? They might just be succeeding at that (allegedly, Chuck himself was noted to have

been genuinely amazed when he saw them recording the thing at Chess Studios in mid-'64, and one does not simply walk into Chuck Berry's presence and receive a compliment from the guy for doing one of his tunes).

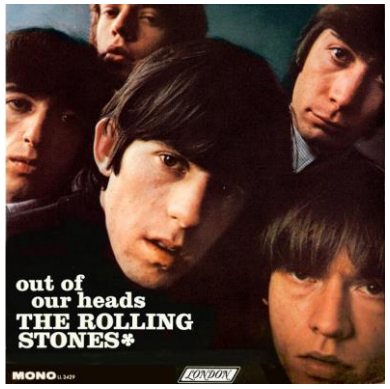
In the 12-bar blues department, they hit some high points, too. 'Little Red Rooster' is an early showcase for Brian, who seems to have a lot of fun doing various animal impressions with his electric slide; I would praise Mick's vocal effort, too, but this time he has to compete against Howlin' Wolf, and that's even more of a no-no than competing with Otis Redding — so let's go along with the flow and agree with the critics who always point out Brian's electric slide parts as the finest ingredient of the song. Such was the power wielded by the Stones at the time that the song, released as a tentative single, shot to #1 on the UK charts — the first time ever in the history of 12-bar blues, and probably the first time ever in the history of songs written about a dysfunctional penis.

That said, my personal favorite out of the generic blues tunes on this album has always been 'What A Shame', another re-write of something Jimmy Reed-style on which the band just sounds so admirably tight — every single musician, including the rhythm section and the pianist, contributing on an equal level, all melodies sharpened razor-style (gotta love Keith's ascending bass line at the end of each verse) and with perhaps the single best case of «guitar weaving» between Keith and Brian on the entire record, when Brian enters his slide guitar run. Of special interest are the lyrics — seems like a first, timid attempt at writing something socially relevant, proto-'Gimme Shelter' style: "What a shame / They always wanna start a fight / Well it scares me so / I could sleep in the shelter all night"... "shelter", get it? Nobody paid proper attention at the time, but this just might have been the first recorded case where they'd use the spooky potential of their blues-rock sound to accompany a bona fide alarmist message.

In the middle of it all comes the band's first original masterpiece; I wish I could be original myself and award that award to 'Off The Hook', but as groovy as Keith's crunchy riff is, the repetitiveness of the song ultimately works against it (maybe a decent bridge could have been a better choice than the endless vamp of "it's off the hook, it's off the hook, it's off the hook..."), so I still have to go along with 'Heart Of Stone'. Curiously, from a melodic standpoint it seems like it may have begun life as a variation on the aforementioned 'Pain In My Heart' (they share plenty of similarities in all aspects of melody, structure, lyrics, etc.), but the Stones have turned the tables and made life more complex — now it's not about a girl who is breaking the protagonist's heart, it's about a girl who is *not* breaking the protagonist's heart, yet at the same time you can feel that the protagonist's heart is on the breaking point anyway, adding an extra level of psychologism: "...this heart of stone" is delivered by Jagger in such a way that you can't help noticing a serious internal contradiction.

Overall, 'Heart Of Stone' has to qualify as Mick's first truly gripping dramatic performance. It would still take him a few years to become a consistently first-rate voice actor in the studio (an ability that, unfortunately, he was rarely able to take with him on stage), but the modulation range on 'Heart Of Stone' is already quite impressive — from the opening cockiness of "there've been so many girls that I've known..." to the childishly puzzled intonations on "what's different about her?" to the bitter pleading of "don't keep on looking..." to the desperate self-denial of "you'll never break this heart of stone, oh no...", this shows the Stones already adhering to that one maxim which made their classic period so, well, classic — you may not believe in the stuff you write, but it is your sacred duty to make it believable for everybody else. And do not forget Keith, either, who accordingly plays the wailing guitar solo like a man gone crazy with grief: a beautiful 15-second ascension from grumbly gloominess to desperate hysterics that packs as much emotional punch into it as any Eric Clapton performance, even without doing anything particularly inventive with the standard blues scale. Play this one next to 'Tell Me' and see how much deeper these guys learned to crawl under your skin in just half a year's time.

In conclusion, one would be forced to admit that maybe the record was not *nearly* as fabulous as to allow you the infamous moral right to follow the advice printed inside the sleeve notes and "see that blind man knock him on the head, steal his wallet and have the loot" (hey Mr. Andrew Loog Oldham, we really need you in the 2020s to help us shape our social strategies once again!). But in the context of early '65, it was still totally cutting edge. Perhaps the formal «shape» of the Rolling Stones was not yet completely formed, since they still had to largely rely upon borrowing other people's skeletal structures instead of supplying their own, but the «spirit» was every bit as vibrant and flamboyant as it would be at any later point of their finest decade. For the rest of 1965, they would officially qualify as an A-level singles band and more of a B-level album band — but **The Rolling Stones, Now!** is just amazingly consistent from top to bottom, and remains, as it has always been, my first and foremost recommendation for a thorough, multi-sided acquaintance with the first (and most commonly neglected) phase of the band's career.



OUT OF OUR HEADS

Album released:	V	A	L	U	E	More info:
July 30, 1965	3	3	4	2	3	

Tracks: 1) Mercy Mercy; 2) Hitch Hike; 3) The Last Time; 4) That's How Strong My Love Is; 5) Good Times; 6) I'm All Right (live); 7) (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction; 8) Cry To Me; 9) The Under Assistant West Coast Promotion Man; 10) Play With Fire; 11) The Spider And The Fly; 12) One More Try.

REVIEW

By mid-'65, with Dylan going electric and the Beatles going acoustic (sort of), it was becoming clear that a lot of change was in the air, and that the original British Invasion strategies of 1963–64 were no longer going to work. Glossy pop bands that wrote three-minute songs about girls (and, occasionally, cars) had to expand both their bag of musical tricks *and* their vocabularies in order to survive, while rough and tough rhythm'n'blues bands had to desist sticking to covers of their American idols and use their accumulated experience for properly creative purposes. Only a select few managed to make that crossing — many bands drowned along the way, like The Dave Clark Five or The Animals (at least, the *original* ones), while others, like The Hollies or The Yardbirds, thrashed and floundered for a while, occasionally thriving in the new environment but ultimately still dragged down by the times.

As good and time-honored (I do insist) as those early Stones records were, I am pretty sure there could have been some serious doubt, as 1965 loomed on the horizon, about the band's capability of artistic survival in this new, far more

demanding age. For sure, they had a great groove going, but so did The Animals; and whether they would be able to switch from their — admittedly highly polished and sharpened — take on the beats of Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, and Jimmy Reed was a question waiting to be answered. Meanwhile, their «original leader», Brian Jones, turned out to be completely inefficient when it came to any sorts of songwriting, and as for the soon-to-be «Glimmer Twins», they weren't doing too hot for the first couple of years either: not only did they have to live forever with the humiliation of the Beatles writing their first hit song for them, but just about everything Mick and Keith got out of their own heads in 1963–64 had a clear aura of timidity around it. Covering Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters seemed to give them confidence; performing their own songs such as 'Grown Up Wrong' or 'Surprise Surprise' seemed to suck it back out of them.

The first indication that the Jagger-Richards theme might be starting to grow into something worth keeping tabs on was arguably 'Heart Of Stone' — a great soul ballad in its own right, yet not exactly a great candidate to set the brand new world on fire. That honor, so it seems, would belong to 'The Last Time', not one of my favorite Stones songs but an important milestone all the same. First and foremost, 'The Last Time' introduces Keith Richards The Riffmeister — that simple, jumpy, see-sawing, undeniably unforgettable chord sequence, which might have been developed by the guitarist while riffing around the 'Everybody Needs Somebody To Love' groove, opens up one of the greatest Epic Riff Runs in the history of popular music. Certainly Keith Richards did not invent the guitar riff, but he probably did more to establish it as the basis for hard rock in those early days than anybody else; my only problem with the riff of 'The Last Time' is that it feels catchy, but not particularly «meaningful» — very soon, Keith would start coming up with melodic phrases that almost read like genuine messages to the brain, but here, I'm still trying to figure out which exact message the slingshot of 'The Last Time' is hurling at my perception centers.

Another innovative quality of the song is its unusually grand, booming, echoey production — apparently, the Stones had crossed paths with Phil Spector himself on that early January day at the RCA Studios in Hollywood, and, though uncredited on the official record, he assisted them with the mix so that, for the first time ever, the Stones ended up sounding larger than themselves. The song itself was hardly all that grand to merit the bombastic Phil Spector touch, but it actually helped cover the deficiency of the solo break — neither Keith nor Brian had any good ideas in store here, so the solo becomes just an arpeggiated variation on the riff itself. Meanwhile, Jagger cleverly borrows an old gospel trope — in its original and most lyrically and melodically similar form, it can be heard on The Staple Singers' 'This May Be The Last Time' — readapting it from religious to completely secular purposes and turning what used to be a mildly threatening apocalyptic invocation into a ballsy pop hook. (Occasional irate howls about the Stones «stealing» the song make no sense whatsoever because what

they are doing here is *quoting*, not *stealing* — which is a great incentive for comparative culturological analysis, but a pretty poor basis for a lawsuit, let alone holier-than-thou moralizing).

Yet for all the importance of 'The Last Time' to the maturation of rock music in the mid-Sixties, I would dare suggest that it was the B-side that first suggested the Stones were to be something more than «just the greatest rock'n'roll band in the world». 'Play With Fire' announced an entirely new type of Stones music, one that would reach its apogee in 1966-1967 and then retire into a relatively latent state: the «Anglo-Stones», finally consenting to turn their heads away from across the Atlantic and back to their native shores. A dark acoustic ballad, further colored with Jack Nitzsche's baroque harpsichord lines, and with lyrics that namedrop plenty of English realities, replacing the barely known (and barely pronounceable) Winona, Kingman, Barstow, and San Bernardino with the more familiar Saint John's Wood, Stepney, and Knightsbridge, it sounds like a barely veiled threat to the upper classes — and it was recorded and released several months prior to 'Like A Rolling Stone', with which it shared at least the basic theme, if not the details.

If Mick Jagger sounded like a mere lascivious midnight rambler in 1964, then on 'Play With Fire' he actually sounds like a real menace — and all he has to do is keep that voice down to a stern, but calm, half-spoken tone. "*Well you've got your diamonds... and you got your pretty clothes...*" — the very first line already gives it away that this situation is probably not going to stay the same for very long. The lyrics aren't completely transparent, though, as the song's greatest enigma remains in the personality of its first-person protagonist: "*So don't play with me / 'cause you play with fire*". Who exactly is *me*? The young socialite's rebellious underdog lover? How would she be «playing with him», then, and how would that relate to the main bulk of the verses? Could the *me* actually be something more abstract — the Dark Force, perhaps? There's definitely a bit of a sulfur-and-brimstone whiff around those somber chords.

In any case, based on whatever the Stones were doing in 1964, a song like 'The Last Time' *could* be predicted; after all, it embraces pretty much the same spirit as 'It's All Over Now', which, by the way, was also riff-driven, even if its riff was not nearly as distinctive and melodic. But nothing from their first two years of activity suggests the emergence of 'Play With Fire'. What on earth drove them to record a song that begins like some Joan Baez folk ballad and then continues in a «John Lee Hooker meets Johann Sebastian Bach» sort of vein? There wasn't even any Marianne Faithfull on the horizon yet to push her thick-lipped lover boy into the proverbial artsy-fartsy direction! All we know is that Mick and Keith supposedly wrote this while staying in their hotel room in Washington, with Keith strumming his Gibson Hummingbird and Mick improvising to the chords. But what exactly pushed them in *that* direction remains unclear.

Still, in the context of 1965 'Play With Fire' remained an anomaly for the group — this particular vibe was so very much ahead of its time, it had to wait around until 1966, when the band's «pop phase» would really kick in. But it was awful nice to offload it on both the British and American public, as a B-side addition to the irresistible temptation of 'The Last Time', which went all the way to #1 on the UK charts, though it stalled at #9 on the US market (lower, actually, than 'Time Is On My Side' from the previous year). For the first time ever, both sides of the single would be credited to Jagger-Richards; and for the first time ever, a hard-rocking original composition on Side A would be subtly mollified by an «artsier» creation on Side B, a strategy that the Glimmer Twins would quite often put into action in the future (remember, for instance, the much underrated psychedelic mini-masterpiece 'Child Of The Moon' as the B-side to 'Jumpin' Jack Flash').

Then came June 5, 1965, and with it, '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction'. It's a little funny that the song it eventually displaced from the top of the US charts was another «*I Can't*» song — the Four Tops' 'I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch)'... and now that I've reminded myself how it goes, I can actually find a few similarities between its own opening piano riff and the one on 'Satisfaction'. This is sheer accident, of course, but it's still ironic how one of the most ecstatically happy songs of the year suddenly gave way to one of its angriest and grumpiest declarations. Later, in concert, Mick would actually downplay the importance of his own creation: the extended jammy codas which you can, for instance, hear on material from the 1969 American tour (such as captured in the *Gimme Shelter* movie) pretty much turn all the social frustration of the first verses into a short prelude, after which Mick uses the rest of the song to go on an imaginary woman hunt ("*I'm looking for a good woman to give me satisfaction*", etc.). But that's not how it goes in the original version — which is one of the rare cases where I seriously prefer a Stones studio original over the way it evolved in their live show.

The original version keeps a nice, reasonable balance between Jagger's sexual and social dissatisfaction — strongly suggesting that both are very much tied together but never really letting us know if it is sexual dissatisfaction that derives from social one or the other way around. (Which, again, reminds me of that funny bit from the *Gimme Shelter* movie where a post-Altamont Mick watches the footage of a pre-Altamont Mick at the press conference during the tour launch — the pre-Altamont Mick answering a reporter's question with "*well, we're financially dissatisfied, sexually satisfied, philosophically trying*". "*Rubbish*", grimly reacts the post-Altamont Mick). It also has this sly-seductive contrast between the opening soft, slippery, high-pitched vocal and its gradual descent into hysterical hell, whereas in a live setting Mick usually enters his «barking mode» from the get-go — parallel to Keith's lead guitar which just keeps on picking steam until it re-explodes back in all of its fuzzy glory on the chorus.

And speaking of fuzzy glory... it's curious that, although the Maestro FZ-1 Fuzz-Tone device is said to have been introduced by Gibson as early as 1962 (under the influence of Grady Martin's classic «fuzzy» recordings such as 'Don't Worry' and 'The Fuzz'), I cannot for the life of me find any evidence of any commercial recordings made with it *prior* to 'Satisfaction'. Keith himself allegedly used the pedal as a temporary substitute for horns — but the horns never came until the Otis Redding version, so the fuzz pedal had to do, and every one of those fuzzy garage-rock recordings we know from **Nuggets** came *after* 'Satisfaction'. The funny thing is, those old Grady Martin recordings sound pretty nasty and gimmicky; Keith's fuzz tone, however, feels perfectly natural for the song. It's nasty, too, but it's *alive* and nasty, not «synthetic-nasty», if you get my meaning. (This is how it used to go, on that Marty Robbins recording of 'Don't Worry': not only is the sound way too reminiscent of the «faulty equipment» issue, but it doesn't really belong in the song). I even like how the fuzz effect shows signs of instability — instead of running smoothly along with each note, it sometimes intensifies and sometimes weakens as if it had a life of its own, really talking to us and all. No AI could learn how to replicate that.

Of the two epochal youth anthems about «-ations» that came out in 1965 — 'Satisfaction' and 'My Generation' — there is no doubt in my mind which one is the greatest. As much as I like 'My Generation', its flaw is that (like so many Townshend compositions) it overthinks itself; it's really a piece of oversimplified social philosophy masquerading as a rock'n'roll number, from somebody who feels like he might have read a bit too much Jean-Paul Sartre or watched one too many of Jean-Luc Godard's movies. It's certainly not a crime, but it redirects some of the song's magic from your guts toward your brain, thus dampening the «primal» effect of the song. 'Satisfaction' does no such thing; it's all about the protagonist's immediate reaction to the surrounding bullshit, with no overthinking, excessive self-reflection, or, importantly, narcissistic self-aggrandizing whatsoever. "*I can't get no satisfaction*" just seems so much better to go along with the general flow than "*This is my generation, baby*". Who really cares about whose generation it is when the *real* problem is that you're trying to make some girl and she tells you "*baby, better come back maybe next week because you see I'm on a losing streak?*".. Hey, this is why The Rolling Stones really are a «people's band» and The Who appeal so much more to illusion-riddled arthouse audiences. (Not that those target groups don't overlap, mind you).

The good news is, I think, that 'Satisfaction' still stands up tall and proud more than a half-century later. Nobody has really been able to improve on that dirty, stinkin' fuzz tone, or on Charlie's unnerving pounding, or on the line about *some useless information supposed to fire my imagination* — more relevant in the age of social media than anytime before. ("*He can't be a man 'cause he doesn't smoke the same cigarettes as me*" has aged a little more poorly, but if you replace *cigarettes* with *Iphone* you'll be getting there). A more complicated question would be concerning the LP that contains it — how well does

that one stand more than half a century later? Were the Rolling Stones able, by mid-'65, to have their LP-only material stand up to the quality of their singles, like the Beatles (usually) did?

The answer is ambiguous and blurry, and here, once again, we are witnessing the «clever» strategy of the American market: by integrating the band's outstanding singles of 1965, it made the American version of **Out Of Our Heads**, released at the end of July, into a flash of summery splendor next to its UK counterpart, which only came out at the end of September and looked somewhat gray and autumnal in comparison; actually, track-wise it would be more like the equivalent of the equally disappointing US release of **December's Children** (with which it would also share the front sleeve). On the other hand, there is also no denying that the US version of **Out Of Our Heads** seems uncomfortably bumpy in comparison — with A+ level songs sharing the bus with decidedly inferior originals and covers that clearly belong in the pre-'Satisfaction' era.

Take the three above-mentioned biggies off the record, and what you are left with is rather a letdown in comparison with the tightness and excitement of the material on **Now!**. First, there is a clearly defined tilt towards soul-tinged R&B: Don Covay, Marvin Gaye, Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, *and* Solomon Burke all get represented by one song each, as if skinny white boy Mick Jagger were challenging them all to five rounds of a ring fight in half an hour's time. That's quite a cocky challenge if you ask me, and it's even a wonder that he does not continuously fall flat on his face all the time — but he does take a bit of a beating; the problem is that, unlike American blues and American rock'n'roll, American *soul* is that one particular genre which the Rolling Stones, as a *band*, find the most difficult to subvert to their own musical purposes, and in the end, this is where almost everything depends on Mick Jagger, and for all his shrewdness and versatility, Mick Jagger is not going to be *always* able to get what he wants. Well, if he tries sometimes...

Unsurprisingly, things work out best when Mick's musical buddies make a strong effort to support his personal theater. 'Mercy Mercy' was a solid hit for Don Covay on the Atlantic label in the fall of 1964, and, amusingly, Covay's exceptionally passionate vocal performance was allegedly backed by the electric guitar playing of none other than Jimi Hendrix — though only the most seasoned Hendrix expert might have suspected that, what with the rhythm flow indeed being quite Jimi-like in terms of chords and phrasing, but with none of the classic Hendrix flash-and-flair showing up anywhere. It's a nice and colorful guitar part, but also quite modest, never threatening to upstage the singer. You might not even notice it at all. Quite probably nobody ever did back in 1964.

This is something that the Stones set out to remedy — and it helps quite a bit that their cover happened to be recorded on the very same day as 'Satisfaction', with the Maestro FZ-1 still hot from the action. Keith's riff is not as complex or crackling

here as it is on 'Satisfaction', but it still makes the song roll along with a vengeance, and together with Mick's attempt to out-Covay the original singer by pushing his emotional overdrive even deeper into his pharynx, they make the song even less of a genuine plea for mercy and even more of an actual threat. In this version, "*if you leave me baby / Girl if you put me down / I'm gonna make it to the nearest river child / And jump overboard and drown*" becomes a menacing ultimatum. As in, do you *really* want to live out the rest of your years with a lover's suicide weighing heavy on your conscience, girl? You'd better think twice before committing the biggest mistake of your life... This makes the recorded version into a meaningful, garage-y update on the more country-style original — and a hell of an energetic opener for the LP (note that 'Satisfaction' opens the second side, so talk about a strong «fuzzy welcome» each time you interact with your turntable).

Another clever reinvention is 'Cry To Me'. Solomon Burke already was one of the band's most frequently covered artists (perhaps Mick found it easier to adapt to his style than to any other soul singer's), but this is the first time they directly tampered with the original song's mood, groove, and melody, reflecting an increased level of confidence. Burke's big hit for Atlantic was an energetic dance number in the vein of 'Stand By Me', and great as it was, it did create somewhat of a discrepancy between the lively melody and the depressed lyrics. The Stones set out to remedy that flaw; slowing down the tempo and redirecting the song toward a more natural I-vi-IV-V progression, they turn it into a lyrical ballad, and it's a good thing — compare Solomon's jumping into the song with the lively "*WHEN your baby...!*" and Mick's slow easing into it with the tender and breathy "*when your baaaaby...*", creating an atmosphere of empathy and consolation from the very first notes. (Which, by the way, reminds me of the often overlooked role of Mick Jagger as one of the best vocal empathizers in the history of rock music — from 'Cry To Me' to 'Shine A Light' and 'Winter', the man could be a true soulmate like no other, even if this facet of his tends to get forgotten behind all the swagger and posturing).

Meanwhile, on the musical front Brian Jones switches to rhythm guitar, while Keith once again helps out with a lead part that is every bit the rightful soulful counterpart of the vocal. The best is saved for last, when the singer and the guitar player fight each other over the coda with machine-gunned vocal barks and bluesy licks, making the whole thing wilder and crazier than any soul ballad they'd tried out before. There was no such coda in the Burke original, meaning that the Stones also add a whole new dynamic development — the tune starts out as a subtle ballad and ends as a thunderstorm. You must, therefore, excuse me for openly declaring that the reinvented version is downright superior to the original, even if Mick Jagger could never hope to be able to belt out "*DON'T YOU FEEL LIKE CRYYYYYING*" with all the un-earthly power of the «Muhammad Ali of Soul». Sometimes, though, inventiveness and subtlety carry the day over brashness and brawn.

But not everything works as smoothly as it does on 'Mercy Mercy' and 'Cry To Me'. On the other three covers, the band does not manage to come up with similarly creative rearrangements, and the entire burden of living up to the originals is placed on Mick's shoulders — with somewhat competent, but ultimately useless results. Marvin Gaye's 'Hitch Hike' is a bit stiff, Mick has a hard time matching Marvin's vivaciousness, and the guitar accompaniment is actually *less* creative than the cool brass and woodwind interplay on the Motown original. Otis Redding's 'That's How Strong My Love Is' is copied faithfully to the original, which means that the guitars are just out there strumming, and it's all about Mick Jagger trying to imitate Otis' "now I'm soft and tremble and weepy / now I'm incensed and energized and screechy" approach... and it's not a half-bad imitation, but it would all be much better once he'd start using all that experience for his own compositions rather than directly copying the vibe of one of the greatest soul singers of all time. Precisely the same judgement applies to Sam Cooke's 'Good Times' — a beautiful pop song in its own right to which the Stones add absolutely nothing. (Other than, perhaps, Charlie Watts' magnificently rolled drum intro).

With all that soul stuff scattered around, one might almost forget about the Rolling Stones being a rock'n'roll band. To hastily remedy that at the last moment, Decca pads the record with a live version of Bo Diddley's ritualistic vamp 'I'm All Right', «borrowed» from the earlier EP **Got Live If You Want It!** (released in June '65 and recorded three months earlier). It's a good, classic example of an early «Stones rave» (though it's much too short to properly convey the trance-inducing powers of the Stones in that era), but there are some problems — first, it's live, so there are obvious problems with sound fidelity; second, it feels ripped out of its dutiful context; and third, it would be reinstated back into its dutiful context on next year's full-fledged live LP (I think that the actual recorded instrumental track might be exactly the same, but the vocals would be re-recorded in the studio). As enjoyable as some of those «dive-bomb» guitar patterns from Brian can be, the track does not really feel at ease sitting here in the middle of the LP.

There is still enough space left for three more originals, at least two of which qualify as throwaways, albeit of a very different nature. 'The Under Assistant West Coast Promotion Man' is basically a repetitive one-riff vamp (could have been a serious influence on The Velvet Underground, though) whose primary purpose, as I had thought for a pretty long time, was to vent some frustration at the alarmingly expanding ego of Andrew Loog Oldham, but, apparently, the *true* culprit here was a certain George Sherlock Raymond Jr. (obviously no relation to the protagonist of the Buster Keaton movie), one of Decca's promotion department people who irritated the band so much that they pilfered the groove from Buster Brown's 'Fannie Mae' and the song titling principle from Bob Dylan to write one of their first bits of specifically targeted social satire. The only thing I really admire about it are Mick's highly expressive ejective fricatives on the "*sss'eer-ssss'ucker ssss'uit*"

adlibbing bit at the end. Other than that — well, it's always fun to hear the Rolling Stones get angry and sarcastic about something or somebody, but it doesn't always automatically imply classic status.

Another bit of unsatisfactory filler is the two-minute long 'One More Try', a fast, cheery pop-rocker that shares a similar vibe with their very first single — the cover of Chuck Berry's 'Come On' — and, honestly, sounds as if it could have been written around the same time (early 1963, that is). I really like Brian Jones' harmonica part — during the instrumental break, at one point he seems to really «lift off» and briefly take the band in some different and exciting direction — but everything else about it feels trivial and disappointing, particularly the wannabe-uplifting chorus of "*don't you panick, don't you panick, give it one more try!*". Four years later, the Stones would grow up big enough to add an epic feel to this kind of encouraging vibe and end up with 'You Can't Always Get What You Want'; *this*, however, is child play, especially sitting next to the likes of 'Satisfaction' or 'Cry To Me'.

On the other hand, the album's one genuinely «sleeping gem» is the original B-side to 'Satisfaction': 'The Spider And The Fly', riding on a cool, calm and collected mid-tempo Jimmy Reed groove, is a delightfully devilish and cynical exploration of the subject of sexual temptation, a song that would surely have ended up on Oscar Wilde's playlist had he lived to be a hundred and fifty. The yarn spun by Mick over three and a half minutes offers no moralistic conclusions whatsoever, and the story does not even have an ending — we never get to learn what happened to the protagonist's relation with his "*girl at home*" after his sordid tryst with the random lady who "*was common, flirty, looked about thirty*" and "*said she liked the way I held the microphone*", but something tells me he could hardly be expected to be repentant about what had perspired. In any case, what matters are not the words as is the intonation with which most of them are sung: slow, drawly, grinning from ear to ear, this is the first occasion on a Stones record where Mick Jagger goes for a positively «Luciferian» delivery that would, naturally, reach its apogee on 'Sympathy For The Devil' three years later.

The atmospheric / emotional contrast between the likes of 'The Spider And The Fly' and 'Cry To Me' is, in fact, quite astonishing — it's a much, much wider range than anything any of the Beatles were capable of, and while the Beatles *could* get nasty and cynical every once in a while, even bad boy John preferred to openly get in your face rather than play the part of a man possessed by a devilish trickster spirit on the inside. The mere sound of Mick Jagger pronouncing the word "*hi*" in the second verse would send mothers and fathers lock up their daughters — or, in the 2020s, send social media mobs up in flames of moralistic indignation. Meanwhile, Keith Richards completely and utterly conforms to the spirit of his working partner by playing a simple, 100% efficient guitar solo that oozes the same essence of naughty seduction. If 'Satisfaction'

was an almost «righteous» protest song in its core, then its B-side was downright criminal — the anthem of somebody who does *not* shout out loud on every corner about getting no satisfaction, but instead prefers to achieve it surreptitiously and salaciously while breaking every rule of good old-fashioned moral conduct. Utterly disgusting! *And* utterly irresistible. "*The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it*" — remember that one?

As you can see, **Out Of Our Heads** is quite a mixed bunch in the end, a decidedly transitional album if there ever was one for the Stones — which is perfectly normal for 1965, a year of transition for just about everybody, starting with the Beatles themselves. That said, all of my criticisms of the individual songs are thoroughly relative: I do actually enjoy the record from start to finish, because, hey, even 'Hitch Hike' and 'Good Times' are great songs and the Stones do them justice — it's just that I would have no need for them on my desert island if the original versions were available. Any mid-Sixties crossing from «musical adolescence» into «musical maturity» would be a bit of a bumpy ride by definition, and after all these years, it's a lot of fun to look back at all the bumps and discuss the relative degrees, shades, and perks of their bumpiness.