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KEITH RICHARDS

*Plus,
the genius of the Stones
by Martin Scorsese*

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in (and out)



FEATURING

Russell Brand meets Judd Apatow
Pretty and witty: Elizabeth Banks

To mark the release of *Shine A Light*, Martin Scorsese's visceral documentary tribute to The Rolling Stones, Keith Richards — the most extraordinary man in rock'n'roll — hooked up with his biographer, James Fox, for a rare, revealing and, as ever, entertaining conversation

Photographs by Lorenzo Agius

NOT JUST A PRETTY FACE

I GOT TO KNOW KEITH RICHARDS in 1973 when I wrote a piece about him for *The Sunday Times Magazine*. I wasn't a music writer, which is perhaps why Keith was surprised by the article, "The Sound Of The Stones". It described how Keith got his inimitable sound on the guitar, how he produced the riffs that became the musical score for a generation.

He was mainly surprised that anyone had written about him like this because, even 10 years into the Stones, he was treated almost exclusively in the press, on account of the drug taking and the busts as the Prince of Darkness, "the most elegantly wasted man". No one had written, certainly in the mainstream, about him as a musical innovator, or even as a musician.

Maybe he trusted me from that moment. We met again. We got on well. I wrote more about him. I remember him, then, as very like he is now — the cackling, contagious

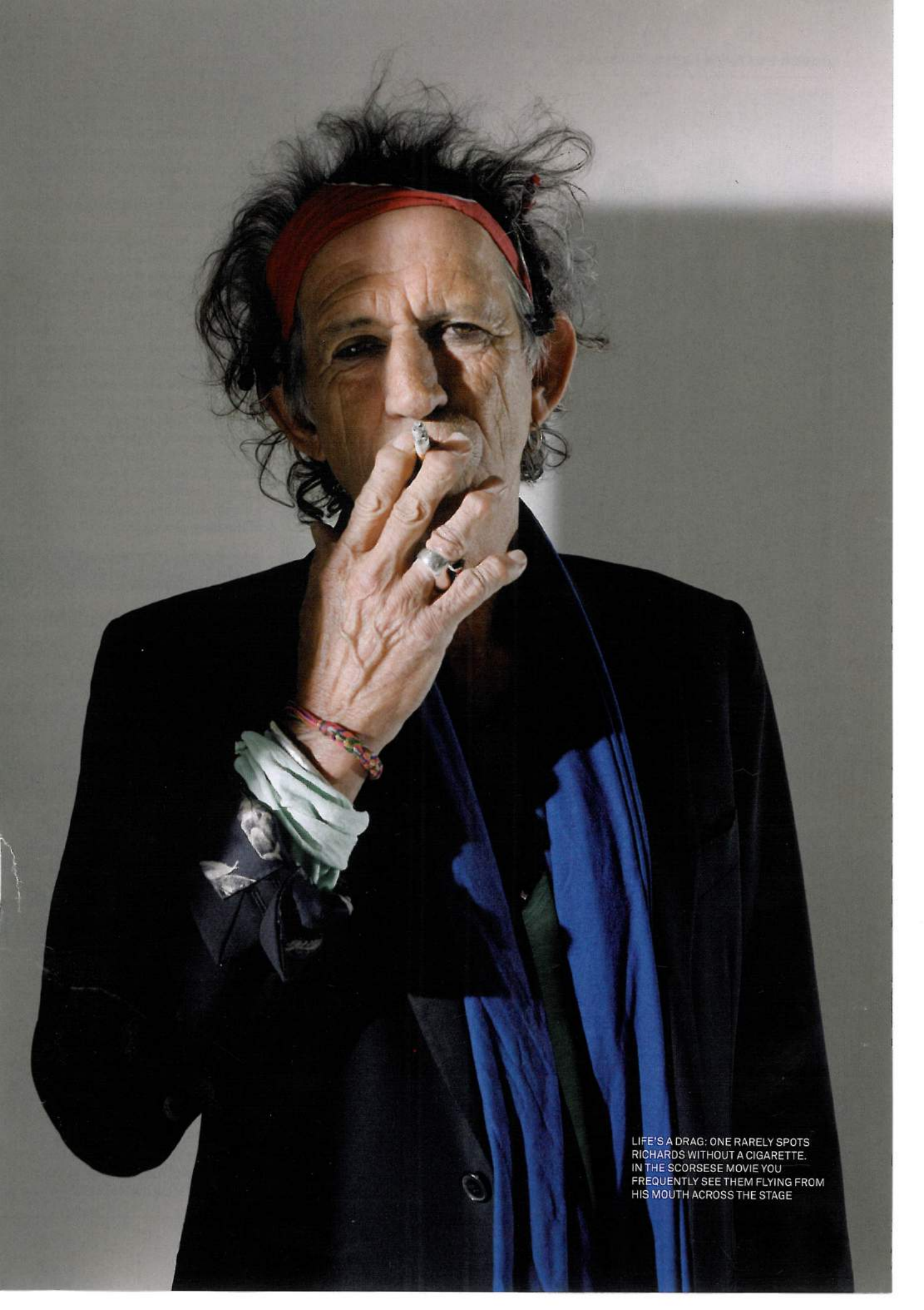
laugh, now with an added wheeze — always the high sense of comedy; his generosity; his unflagging good company; and, above all, his never-ending listening, listening, listening to music. But he did have a dangerous aura; an uncommunicative, forbidding presence that greeted strangers and sometimes non-strangers. He was a big heroin user, always carrying wads of money, a gun and knives. He would "show the blade" to get people off his back — and they usually retreated because he usually meant it: it was a genuinely scary performance.

In 1982, no longer using heroin, he flew me into Wembley Stadium in a helicopter; just him, the model Patti Hansen, who he married a year later, and me. Hovering above the huge, packed stadium on a summer's day — the crowd waiting for this guitar player and that first chord which let loose the world's greatest rock'n'roll band — was a memorable moment.

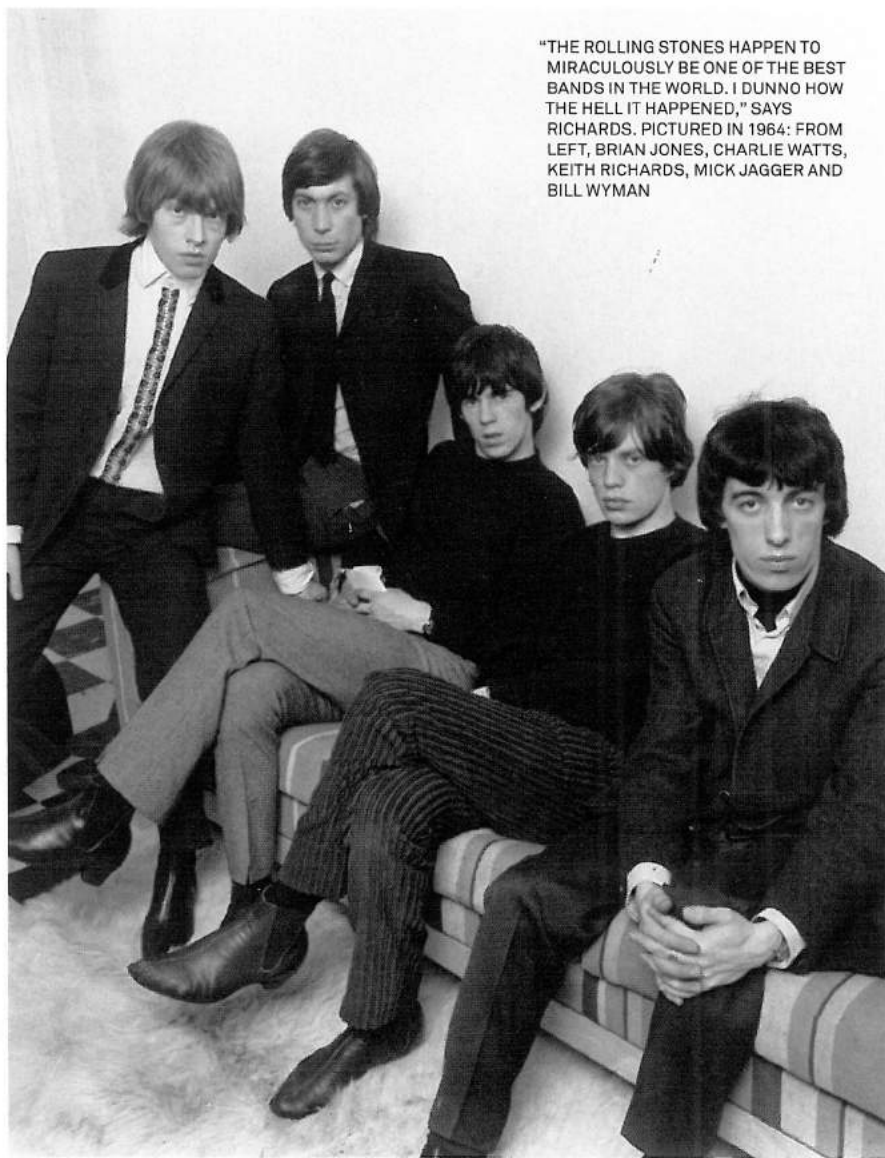
From our first meeting, two things had been clear: Keith was an excellent storyteller with a good memory and a good ear, and, mysteriously, he had a way of speaking, with a cadence and a rhythm, or with a certain economy, that went straight onto the page. The stories were always extraordinary, often otherworldly, of living to extremes — fearlessly so — in pursuit of music and pleasure, and confronting mighty forces that wanted to destroy him. They included some tragedies and sadness that filled a well of pain, tightly sealed away, tapped into only, it seemed, for words and music.

From that first moment on I reminded him, whenever we met, that these stories shouldn't be allowed to evaporate. They must be written into a narrative. And now, for reasons known only to Keith, he thinks the time has come to piece it all together.





LIFE'S A DRAG: ONE RARELY SPOTS RICHARDS WITHOUT A CIGARETTE. IN THE SCORSESE MOVIE YOU FREQUENTLY SEE THEM FLYING FROM HIS MOUTH ACROSS THE STAGE



"THE ROLLING STONES HAPPEN TO MIRACULOUSLY BE ONE OF THE BEST BANDS IN THE WORLD. I DUNNO HOW THE HELL IT HAPPENED," SAYS RICHARDS. PICTURED IN 1964: FROM LEFT, BRIAN JONES, CHARLIE WATTS, KEITH RICHARDS, MICK JAGGER AND BILL WYMAN

year of taking it, my intake of cocaine was, yeah, once after a meal. The Cubans had the right idea, and I just felt the same way. I could never get manic about that stuff. Unfortunately for a lot of people, one's not enough.

JF But it helped to keep you up all those nights in the studio?

KR Yeah, with incredibly weird work schedules, deadlines you've got to meet, you've got to finish this song by tomorrow. I enjoyed it occasionally in that way, but basically I used that stuff as a tool, to fit in to where I am. Mind you, it was always the best — or nearly always. I stayed up five days without sleep, doing the mix of "Before They Make Me Run", in Paris². I don't know what was so difficult about it, it just wasn't quite right. The engineer had to be taken away at the end and I fell asleep under the control room desk. I'm woken up eventually, how many hours I never counted, by the Paris police band; a bloody brass band, listening to a playback of the Marseillaise. I'm looking at all these

After the first maniac year of taking cocaine, my intake was once after a meal. The Cubans had the right idea

trousers with, like, red stripes, and I'm dying for a pee, and I've got my shit with me — I was on the stuff at the time. And then I thought, "Oh, I'll just be very English," and I rolled out and said, "Oh my God! I'm terribly sorry." Before they knew it I was out, and they were all "Zut aloring". They had all their dress uniforms for a parade — and there's like 76 of them.

JF Days long gone. You can travel light now. It must be a lot easier.

KR Yes, [back then] you had to put all the bits together. I was staying in the Plaza once in New York; I would fly with a needle and just put it in the hat to fix the feather. I wasn't going to fly with syringes. So the minute I got the shit, well, now I need the syringe, right? My trick was, I'd order up a cup of coffee, because I need a spoon, right? And then I go down and [toy shop] FAO Schwarz was right across

JAMES FOX One of the many things that surprised me, when I first visited you in Turks and Caicos [tropical islands in the West Indies] in January 2005, is how early you were up in the morning. I went swimming around 7am one morning and heard splashing behind me. I looked round and, to my amazement, there you were, swimming, with dogs paddling beside you — a very unexpected sight. When I first got to know you back in the early Seventies, had I seen you up at that hour in the morning, you would have been up for two or three days.

KEITH RICHARDS I can understand that reaction, but hey, who doesn't want to jump in the water when it's there and you feel like swimming? I know that it doesn't meld with my particular image, whatever that is, because the image is made up of a kaleidoscope of other people's ideas of

me. I could surprise them all, still.

JF And now your sleeping habits seem to have become more conventional.

KR Yes, I've found myself sleeping better since the bang on the head¹. I had to give up the bump [cocaine]. How do you think you stay up for so many days? By the time that happened, it was really just once after meals anyway. Thank God I've got a reason to give it up! [Laughs]

JF Once after meals, that's quite restrained.

KR Well, I was reading about cocaine, and in Cuba the cocaine would be passed around with coffee after the dessert, and it would be for digestion, because it is very good for the digestion. The cocaine would come round, and very fine quality I'm sure it was. Everybody would take a spoonful and just pass it around. Wouldn't like to be the last guy on the end of the line [laughs]. After the first maniac

the street from the Plaza. And there, if you went to the third floor, you could buy a [children's] doctors and nurses set that had the barrel and the syringe that fitted the needle that you'd brought. "I'll have three teddy bears, I'll have that remote control car, oh, and a doctors and nurses kit. My niece, you know, she's really into that. Must encourage her. Oh, actually, give me two." Rush back to the room, hook it up and fix it.

JF You lead a healthy life now, you go fishing. The fishing in Turks is wonderful: skimming along the water in your boat, anchoring up on the banks.

KR Just two weeks ago, a manta ray was zooming around our beach. I was in the kayak just trolling about, and I saw these flying fish just in front, leaping, leaping. Now, flying fish don't fly for fun, they fly for panic. I looked around to see what was chasing them, and there was this three-foot wingspan, black manta ray. It's unusual to get them there, inside the reef, so he probably floated in and couldn't find his way out.

JF Not many people know that you're a fisherman.

KR Oh yeah, when I get the time, yeah!

JF And you've caught some whoppers, no?

KR I have indeed. In fact, I had one stuffed. It was a thresher shark, and to my horror they mounted it and also made it talk: I would push a button and it would go "Wow". That was the biggest fish I think I ever caught. It does make your arms long though. They're the toughest buggers:

I walked off like an orang-utan, you know?

JF A friend of yours described a poaching expedition you went on near your house in Connecticut. You caught fish in a wildlife sanctuary and took them home and ate them. Can this be true?

KR There's a very deep, you could almost say pond, but it's a lake, with a waterfall coming down near where I live: a place called Devil's Den. And I was there with George Receli, this drummer from New Orleans who's now with Bob Dylan. We were working together; this was around 2001. You're not supposed to go fishing there, so we're like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and we're catching these incredible fish, these oscars — very tasty. So I said, "Let's put in another hook" and out comes this enormous snapping



"SHE KNEW EVERYTHING AND SHE COULD SAY IT IN FIVE LANGUAGES. SHE SCARED THE PANTS OFF ME," SAID RICHARDS OF HIS THEN GIRLFRIEND ANITA PALLEMBERG, WHO ALSO DATED BRIAN JONES

turtle, as big as this table, man. Jesus Christ, this guy comes lumbering out with my fish in his mouth! And it was like, meet the dinosaurs, or something. The look of horror on my face, and George's, I wish I could have had a camera. And this guy's about ready to pop; he's enormous, he must be about 300 years old. I dropped the rod, picked up this rock and cracked him on the shell with it. "Goddamn, it's you or me, pal." They're vicious; they can bite your foot off. You know, if I frighten you, forget about it.

JF You married into quite a religious family, didn't you?

KR [Two of Patti's] brothers were chaplains in the navy — it's a very naval family, oh they've all been in the bloody navy; I mean totally opposite to where I come from. But when a man loves a woman, you know? I had to fight the whole family to get my hands on Patti. I took Rodney on at theology, because he's a preacher, right? I had to take Gregory on, in some "What are you doing to my sister?" thing. And Alfred, the oldest brother, was the same. He's 6ft something tall — he looks like the Marlboro Man. He didn't like me either. And so I invited him out and said, "Well, let's take it →

Notes

(1) In April 2006, Richards sustained a serious head injury after falling from a tree in Fiji (2) This was during the recording of the album *Some Girls*, 1978 (3) Patti Hansen, Keith's wife, was a top model in New York when they met in 1981. She comes from a large and very religious working-class family who, at first, were not at all impressed by Keith. They now approve, however, and members of the Hansen family live close to Keith's home in Connecticut

MICK JAGGER AND RICHARDS OUTSIDE COURT IN CHICHESTER AFTER BEING RELEASED ON BAIL FOLLOWING THE REDLANDS DRUGS BUST, MAY 1967. THE PRESS TREATED RICHARDS AS THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS



outside, let's take it in the yard, and duke it out. I mean, you'll probably kill me, but you'll never walk the same again." And after that we made our peace and now he's one of my greatest friends.

JF Was there pressure on you to repent your sins and shake hands with Jesus?

KR Oh, no, no, no, no. No, no, no, no! They knew better than that. It's not that they're crazy Christians, they're just very Christian. And I just take it as it comes, you know? I've read the Koran too. I just think God gave us our intelligence to be able to figure things out for ourselves and not believe something that was written by men. Leave it at that.

JF In the very early days, when you were on tour with Little Richard, didn't he occasionally try and lay it on you and do some preaching?

KR Oh, I've had some of that, but it's not something you stay around for. My terror is becoming a preacher myself. Several times I've found myself doing that. In Jamaica⁴, there was discontent among the Rastas⁵, and we're talking Steer Town here, a tough town. I assembled them all in my driveway and I just read the law to them: "What's the beef?" God knows what I said — "Jah would not like this!" Either they got bored with me, or it was because I passed some booze around and some

spliffs, but they all sat around in a circle, what they call *reasoning*. By then you're talking, basically arbitration, and it sorted itself out. It wasn't a beef with me, it was a beef between themselves. [I thought] "What the hell am I doing?" I've got a big stick in one hand, wagging my finger with the other, and yelling, "Ain't no Rastaman, you no Rasta!"

JF Well, in another life and time, you might have been a district officer in the Raj or in Africa, dispensing justice from a tent.

KR Yes, I always fancied that: district commissioner, with the long shorts and the socks.

JF Members of your band have told me that whenever someone's got a problem, you're the one they go to.

KR Basically it's just by influence: a nod or a wink.

JF You obviously have leadership qualities.

KR That's what they said in the Boy Scouts! That's how I got to be patrol leader within six weeks — just shot to the top, just like that. That's the first time I realised I might have that possibility. I'm like, "Hey I'm just going to duck and dive." But that was very interesting to me: once I had a bunch of guys together, it doesn't matter if it was the Scouts or a band, I could sort of see my way clear to pull all of their various little talents together and see a picture. Wait till I start my gang.

JF In *Shine A Light*⁶ Martin Scorsese puts across so much of the old Stones energy. He gets so close to the band, close to the sound, yet you never see one of the multiple cameras with which he achieved it.

KR I thought it was going to be very difficult for the band to put on a show, and at the same time be aware that you're making a movie. I know how fairy-wary Mick gets when any big deal is going on, and what I really admired about it was that Marty had the place loaded with cameras, all kinds of gizmos and stuff, but I personally wasn't hindered — and I don't think anyone else was. We could just do what we wanted. It was like, hey, you just walked into a show.

JF I talked to Martin Scorsese [see box] and it's moving what he says about the Stones' music being the inspiration for all his work, from *Mean Streets* on. [Gonzo journalist] Hunter S Thompson, also once said that the Stones' music was the fuel that drove *Fear And Loathing In Las*

Notes

(4) Keith has had a house in Jamaica since 1972 (5) This incident was in 1995 when Keith was recording in Jamaica with his Rastafarian group of singers, Wingless Angels (6) Scorsese, who has used music by The Rolling Stones in many of his seminal films, shot his documentary about The Rolling Stones live experience over two nights at the Beacon Theater in New York in the autumn of 2006

Vegas. It was the soundtrack to the times. Scorsese says it was the energy, but also the attitude, that he fell in love with.

I suppose you're not the person I should ask about that.

KR No, because I *am* the attitude [laughs]. So that's very hard to describe isn't it? Maybe it's the difference between an attitude or an act? I'm not an actor.

JF It was the attitude that nearly brought the tent down? It must be a real irony for you, with what you know now — reading about that sleazy period, from Suez onwards. The post-war establishment was very jittery and touchy, they didn't like satire or cheek. The whole state came down on you.

KR Oh yeah. Bless their hearts. At the beginning it was just great: thousands of chicks screaming at you and within six weeks you're the biggest thing since sliced bread — not including The Beatles, of course, always. But I mean, you were kind of swept away. Everything up until the Sixties seemed to be, "That's the way it is." You grew up; you were comfy with it. And

Marty had the place loaded with cameras, all kinds of gizmos and stuff, but I personally wasn't hindered

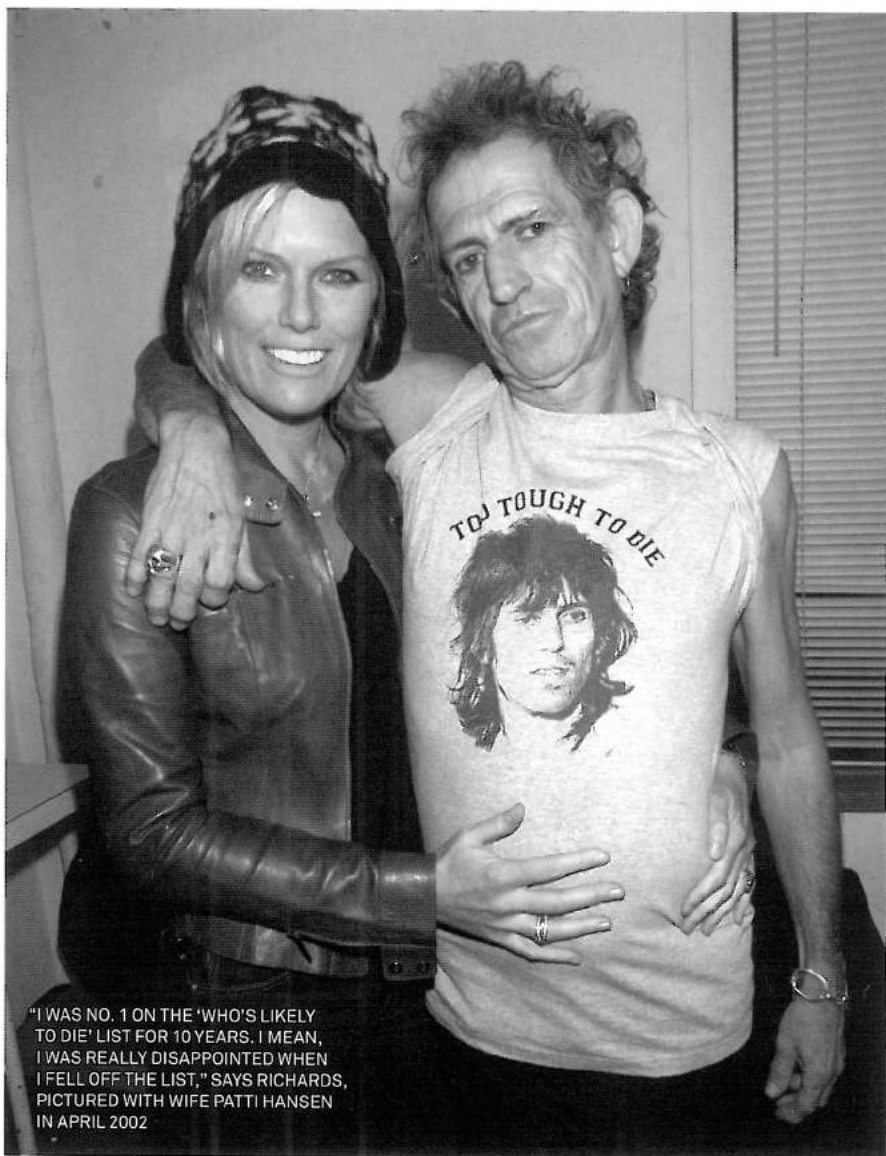
in reality, '63, '64 — bang. You could feel it boiling actually, if you were there at the time.

JF It's amazing to think that some states in America tried to outlaw rock'n'roll. I'd like to have seen the draft legislation. It's almost as if there was a serious sense of threat. You, a guitar player...

KR [Makes pleading gesture] A mere minstrel. A threat to society. I'll sing for my supper, baby. Suddenly you realised you'd become a focal point. They'd got to leave The Beatles alone, because they'd already, like, dubbed them. There's two ways that authorities deal with things like that, one is to absorb, and the other is to nail. And we got the nail.

Notes

(7) In 1967, police raided Keith's Sussex mansion, and arrested Richards, Mick Jagger and others for possession of drugs. They were tried and given prison sentences. William Rees-Mogg wrote an editorial in *The Times* protesting that Richards and Jagger were being unfairly punished. The article helped to bring forward the appeals, in which the sentences were quashed (8) Chuck Berry was one of the pioneers of rock'n'roll, famous for hits such as "Roll Over Beethoven"



JF And then the people who thought they had put you away forever were dragged off simply by an editorial in *The Times*.

KR The fact is, we actually got saved by [William] Rees-Mogg, right? He did the "breaking the butterfly on the wheel" line. He saw it, because believe me, I felt like the butterfly at the time, and I'm gonna be broken, you know?

JF I noticed, early on, the way you commune with not only ancestors but living musicians that you admire. You have a sense of them being like a family of gods around the place. There'll be a fax taped to the wall. "Dear Chuck⁸, we've had our ups and downs..."

KR Oh yeah, sometimes you're just listening to the radio, and you hear the guy and say, "Shit, I should get in touch and say hi." Musicians are weird: all of us, over the years, have known each other off and on, here and there, but it's always ships in the night. That's the nature of the game. It's the road isn't it? But then when you randomly hear something they've done, maybe in the car, you're like, "Shit!" I'm not a big one for phoning, but I feel like I've got to get in touch and say, "Oh, I just heard so and so. That was the best thing I ever heard you do, baby." You've got to tip the hat occasionally.

JF Did you know Chuck Berry was here →

FASHION BY MARYAM MALAKPOUR
FOR MARGARETMALDONADO.COM
FASHION ASSISTANT: NICOLAS BRU



last night, in Berlin?

KR I did hear, but I couldn't make it, I'd just arrived. Hey, hats off to Chuck any time. He's 81 at least. The man has always amazed me. I mean, sure there are a few rough edges between us, but that's because he knows I'm better than him [laughs]. But I'm not.

JF It's incredible how your star has risen in the last couple of years or so. I was very impressed in Paris⁹ when you'd come back from falling out of that coconut tree...

KR Oh that...

JF ... and the audience was waving inflatable palms at you. It could have been a brilliant piece of merchandising, but it also carried a lot of affection. That was a milestone.

KR They know I like a good joke, bless their hearts. They're wonderful: my crowd is... in a way, there's a bit of a smirk and an in-joke. I fall out of a tree; they give me one.

JF When I saw all those screaming girls on the red carpet for *Pirates Of The Caribbean*¹⁰, I thought you were back in 1964. Maybe some of it is a rub-off from Johnny Depp, but maybe not. You've got a new audience.

KR Connections.

JF You've also done an ad for Louis Vuitton: you and Gorbachev, Catherine Deneuve and Andre Agassi. What prompted that, promoting luggage at this point in your career?

KR I basically did it for this outfit, The Climate Project¹¹. And I got a great guitar case out of it! [Laughs]

JF It's pretty amazing to meet in Berlin. Especially since this is the origin of all that scared your mother, Doris¹²: you in your pram as the bombs came down on "Bomb Alley", as Dartford was known.

KR Yeah, the buggers started it from here.

JF I always notice the books you have lying around. Almost every time I've come to Redlands, or your other houses, when you're not working, I've walked into the room and you're reading. One time you were reading a very learned book about ancient Rome. Another time, when I asked, you replied, "Biggles."

KR Anita¹³ sent me this. It's the most amazing book, *Standing Up To Hitler*,

MARTIN SCORSESE ON THE ROLLING STONES

The legendary film director on the band's considerable influence on his life and art

"The Rolling Stones provided the musical score to my life. The energy of the work, the energy of the sound, created images in my mind and created inspiration. It was also a provocation to me to work and to create. I don't want to sound pretentious about it, but The Rolling Stones freed me. It was the nature of the songs themselves; what they were saying had a darker edge to it, a very ironic sense of humour. For me, it seemed to relate to what I knew as truth from where I grew up. One can talk about art, one can talk about politics, one can talk about living a certain way of life, but first a man has to eat. And I saw that where I grew up, I saw that right away. I understood certain basic truths about the world I was in, the world I came from, which was, I guess, a lower middle class, working class. The world I was in had a very dangerous edge, and I think some of their music reflected that and allowed me to feel free to record that in my own work. This music was something very special. I learned about the blues through them. I learned about the roots. That's still what holds their music together and still makes their music valid and timeless."



written months before the war started by Geoffrey Moss: "Major, retired." He's a fucking spy, isn't he? And he's travelling through pre-war Europe, obviously spying his head off. It's all about splitting up Czechoslovakia and the tensions between Russia and Hungary. This bloke was on the spot just before it all blew apart.

JF So he understood what was going on?

KR Yeah, he was probably beating his head against a wall: "GET IT?! You know what's gonna happen?" And I'm also reading about swearing here [gestures to *Swearing: A Social History Of Foul Language, Oaths And Profanity In English* by Geoffrey Hughes]. Swearing [is] all about semantics. I mean, there's swearing, but there's "to swear in", "to swear by". These days it's more "to swear at". It's by a linguist, who cold-bloodedly gets cocksucker onto every fucking page. And then there's always some Patrick O'Brian¹⁴. And my son Marlon bought me this very, very interesting book.

JF The Cunt Coloring Book! Jesus.

KR It's 300 cunts. I think it says somewhere "crayons not included".

JF It's very nice of them to have given us a diagram. I didn't know that another word for the *mons veneris* is "Schamberg".

KR I'll start with *Schamberg* and work my way down. Funnily enough in *this* book [referring to the book on swearing] it says the reason the word donkey came back in the 1870s was because ass and arse sounded too much alike, so they brought donkey in. It's an incredible sweep through the language. Fuck comes from after the plague. I know this isn't true: they would Fornicate Under Command of the King. But I'm sure that was implanted, because I mean, fuck is a lot older than that.

JF Well I think we'll leave it at that.

KR Enough for Esquire?

JF I hope so.

KR Let's relax.

JF When we next meet, we've got to come to some decisions about what we're going to keep in or leave out of your memoirs¹⁵. What to leave out is the art of writing.

KR That's where the fairies come in. We're not writing the fucking Bible, are we? [Prolonged laughter] ☺

Shine A Light is out on 11 April

Notes

(9) The Rolling Stones played a concert in Paris, as part of the A Bigger Bang tour, in the summer of 2007 (10) Richards had a cameo role as Captain Teague in *Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End* (2007), the third in the franchise starring Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow. Depp admits to modelling Sparrow on Richards (11) The Climate Project is a non-profit organisation to increase public awareness of the climate crisis (12) Doris, Keith's mother, died in 2007, aged 91 (13) Anita Pallenberg is the mother of Keith's eldest two children, Marlon and Angela. The model and actress was going out with Stones guitarist Brian Jones before getting together with Keith in 1967, who she remained with until 1980 (14) Patrick O'Brian is the English-born novelist best known for his Aubrey/Maturin series, spanning 20 books and centring on life in the British navy during the Napoleonic Wars. The 2003 film, *Master And Commander: The Far Side Of The World*, was loosely based on three of the novels in the series (15) James Fox is working with Keith Richards on his memoirs, due for publication by Little, Brown in 2010