



Stones line-up: Bill Wyman, Charlie Watts and Keith Richard

For the past few months the Rolling Stones have been polishing their bandwagon in readiness for their first British tour since 1971. **James Fox** reports on the way they live now

GATHERING NO MOSS

IN GLASGOW tomorrow the Rolling Stones begin the British section of their European tour, which ends with six concerts at Earls Court—an unusual place for a rock show but still not large enough to take all the people who want to see the Stones: one million applications will be sent back.

Their music has changed since their exile in 1971. In Frankfurt, where I saw the second concert of the tour, Mick Jagger was still his impeccably demonic self but the sound was bad and he had to work hard through the 10-year-old standards to win the evening. No hysteria, no violence: all that's in the past, it seems. Behind the old driving rock sound of the great Keith Richard and the new Stone Ronnie Wood, they have taken in Latin American and Caribbean sounds and are experimenting with rhythms which are still black in origin but a long way from Chuck Berry.

Just before the tour I went to their villa in Cannes where they had regrouped for rehearsals. Two grey Ferraris were parked outside; the wrestlers in the kitchen nodded at me; the two-way radios crackled. Six pm was just before breakfast time for the Stones. Marlon, Keith Richard's seven-year-old son, nanny-less, keeps his own hours quite happily, herding a large family of guinea pigs and a tortoise he found in the garden. He shares a room with Keith which, like their lakeside home in Geneva, is chaotic. Everyone has posters of themselves or the band on their bedroom walls except Mick, who has occupied the master bedroom; this still has a few "good pieces"—a Chagall drawing, a Derain gouache.

In the rehearsal room, which used to be a sunken drawing room, there were eight keyboards for accompanist Billy Preston, about two dozen guitars (one in crushed mother-of-pearl, another on the theme of "Treasure Island"), several amplifiers and special gadgets plugged into the washing-machine socket in the kitchen. Last night's rehearsal session had been cleaned up and the little red pilot lights were waiting for the next. At about 7 pm Keith Richard appeared, adorned in his rock-and-roll rags, with a big skull set into a large gold ring on his finger. Mick arrived a few minutes later, in sneakers and corduroys, swinging his habitual bottle of ginger ale.

"Where I live," said Mick. "That's the question I've been asked more than any. I'm planning to buy a house in New York. Most of the time I'm in the studio or on the road. Rather nomadic, because of the tax thing. France is quiet, but there's no music in France, you can't call up a session, so that's why New York is better for me. Oh yeah, we don't like it, it's unsettling, but on the other hand we did

get into a bit of a rut in England and I've changed completely since I left. There's only a few things you need: books and clothes. I've got it down to one suitcase and one guitar now, and a few cassette machines."

"Any time I'm not touring or making a record," said Keith, "I feel redundant. I turn to all kinds of weird chemicals to make up for it, and that's not good for me. People are always saying about me they can't understand how I've survived so long—they've got this image of me—but that's because so many of them are weak in their nervous systems and imagine everyone else is too. The worst damage you can see around is alcohol."

Keith Richard likes his Jack Daniels; Mick Jagger likes his Carlsberg Specials; I was now offered a scotch and ginger by Jim Callaghan—an ex-New York policeman who is head of the Stones' security corps. Keith went on: "People's idea about junk is equivalent to what people think about meths drinkers and winos, who are greedy, who are the dregs, who just go over the top. You should take the trouble to know what the stuff does, how it works, and decide physically and mentally whether you're capable of handling it."

Mick described a Press conference arranged that day by Spanish television, where the reporters could speak neither French nor English and read questions phonetically from a piece of paper. "They asked: 'Have you ever played in Spain before?' and Charlie said 'No, you're just a bunch of fascists,' which wasn't exactly the reason. The reason why we're going to play in Barcelona in June is because we say we're going. Promoters are frightened of going to places where they don't make money and all Latin people are a bunch of hassles. But on the other hand it does us a lot of good to go to those places. Italy is the worst. There's *always* tear gas in Milan. Keith will tell you."

Keith was sitting cross-legged in the middle of a pile of guitars, crushing aspirins with his Cartier lighter, engraved by Piaget. Mick continued: "Do you remember that Press conference in the hotel in Rome? When they took our baggage truck? When I had to jump over the wall? They are very difficult people. I kicked a *papparazza* in the balls."

All this time, promoters, sidemen, roadies, French lawyers (one in a pair of embroidered blue suede cowboy boots) were coming in and out of the room. "What is this?" said Marlon, "a party house? Or what?"

"I've never really felt physically scared," said Keith. "Although maybe I should have, looking back on it. More often I feel scared for the people in the audiences. At some of the shows they



Leader and new star: Mick Jagger with Ronnie Wood

were crushed to the point where they passed out. We've walked into gigs in the Sixties in Catford and places where the whole backstage area was like the Crimean War. All these kids gasping and lying in corners, puking, all blotchy, purple, bloated faces, and teeth missing. We usually caught a glimpse of it as we were leaving."

"I don't see why we shouldn't play anywhere as long as there are no hassles," said Mick. "Somebody said to me 'Why do you go on holiday to Brazil which is a fascist country?' I don't think in music you should worry about the politics of a country. I mean, the Russians like US country music. So does George Wallace, and the Chinese like Nixon. The fascist view and the Marxist view coincide in the result. In the interpretation, they don't. Charlie and I had a big argument over dinner about playing in South Africa. I went to the Apollo theatre in Harlem to a jazz concert and all the white people sat on one side and all the black people on the other."

The Stones are expert at ending an interview as soon as they lose interest in it. At this point, Mick muttered something about finding a drink, left the room and never returned.

"I get the feeling," said Keith, "that Mick would trade anything about his own position to be accepted into the fraternity of musicians and I think he feels he

never will be really—although he is as far as I am concerned. If he's not accepted, it's basically because he's a lead vocalist and a lead vocalist will never be accepted as just a musician. So that puts the block on it really because you can't have your cake and eat it. And maybe he is slightly lonely. He's got a lot of friends, very good ones, but I get the impression he gives off that feeling of loneliness because he won't give that ultimate extra percentage of trust. I get on with Mick. We go back an awful long time. We're the Glimmer Twins.

"It's extraordinary how that name came about. Back in '68 Mick, Marianne Faithfull, Anita Pallenberg and me took a boat to Rio which was full of these upper-class English people, all drinking like mad, pink gins and pink champagne, crowding the bar. I was dressed at the time in a diaphanous djellaba, Mexican shoes and a tropical army hat. After a while they discovered who we were and became very perturbed. They started asking us questions: 'What are you really trying to do?' and 'Do try to explain us what this whole thing is about.' We never answered them and after a few days one woman stepped forward from the group and said: 'We've been asking you for days and you just won't say. Can't you give us just a glimmer?' Mick turned to me and said: 'We're the Glimmer Twins'."