

All through the night while they rehearsed for the European tour, Keith Richard stood there in a trance with himself, rocking slowly backwards and forwards, playing the same riff again and again. He has a mean face anyway, but he puts meanness and physical menace – the old Stones' flavour – into his movements as he plays. He cultivates it nicely, showing the whites of his eyes like a frightened horse as he lays it down, hitting the guitar downwards with a movement of his whole arm.

His playing is the essence of the Stones' sound, the backbone of the music that has been a 10-year phenomenon in rock history; he emerges more and more as leader of the band, propelling the music with his hard driving rhythm guitar playing. The musicians – Stones and session men – take their cues from Keith. It's all in that opening riff on *Jumping Jack Flash*, two bars of Keith's guitar playing, using only three notes, that come near to a timeless slogan for rock. "Music is one of those things you can never get to the bottom of, thank God," he says. "It was never-ending possibilities. No matter how limited you are you can still find variations and things that please you. Even with the most blatant bubble gum music the roots of it are so obvious to me, and I discovered that a long time ago and I stuck with it. And it's still the most enjoyable way of spending time I can think of."

There are technical secrets to his playing, but mainly he has held on to its original simplicity – rare for rock/blues guitarists of talent – and never grown tired of it. He lays down their best known sound on a five-string guitar tuned to an open chord like the old 'bottleneck' blues guitar players of 40 years ago (*Brown Sugar*, *Jumping Jack Flash*, *Honky Tonk Women*, *Tumbling Dice*, *Happy*, and their greatest hit, *Satisfaction*).

Keith was already playing extraordinary rock guitar in 1964, on tracks like *It's All Over Now*, when the Stones were still imitating their heroes on Chess records. Nobody white was playing like that then. Ian Stewart, who has played piano for the Stones since the beginning, and now manages the road shows as well, knew Keith's playing in the days when they were obsessed by the music of Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters and so on. "We talked about it to insane and ridiculous lengths," said Mick Jagger. "Keith was only



The Rolling Stones 1973 – Mick Jagger sings, backed by Keith Richard

SOUND OF THE STONES

James Fox analyses the skill and technique of their musical style

about 18 when I met him," says Stewart, "and he was well steeped in Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry then, so the feel was there from an early age and what you can't copy is the feel for the thing. Instead of going after the rather flashy B.B. King approach, he plays like the older players. He has never developed that sort of Eric Clapton approach – very fast virtuoso-type guitar. He's still a really good swinging blues guitar player and he leaves these gaps and his timing is perfect. He worries about things like tempo rather than how many notes he can cram into a bar. And he is unique in that he has maintained that approach to guitar-playing whereas everyone else has gone away and seen how fast he can go.

"If you call someone a rhythm guitar player these days it's almost like an insult, which it shouldn't be of course. Keith is just the ultimate

rhythm guitar player. He concentrates on laying it down. On a good night, if he lays something down well, it's laid down the way nobody else can do it. And this is where he's become unique."

What is coming down from the rehearsal studio is the rich sound of vintage Rolling Stones rock – hard and funky with a three-man brass section blowing tight harmonies, featuring Bobby Keys, the session tenor sax who has played Rolling Stones tours for years. Charlie Watts is laying down a beat with a maniacal look in his eyes, energised to be playing music again. Mick Jagger is tinkering with the quadrophonic mixer which balances the sound, needles jumping in their little coral-blue light-boxes. Even without an audience, except for the musicians and the sullen-faced roadies, he takes his prancing sex act for a gentle canter – left hand backwards on hip,

left toe pointed forwards, rocking the beat on his heel. Try it and you'll feel like the greatest rock star in the world – or that bar-room queen in Nashville the Stones sing about.

It's clear the Stones mean business. They are playing eight or nine hours a day, from five in the afternoon to one or two in the morning, with short breaks for Chinese take-away or Hilton club sandwiches. Always there are lashings of Bourbon and beer. (The Stones are very particular about refreshments – Mick Jagger especially has a great love of eating and drinking. On the last American tour he had a circular sent round to each concert hall manager insisting on the following delights to be waiting in every dressing room. Two bottles per show of Chivas Regal, Dewars, or Teachers. Two bottles per show of Jack Daniels Black Label. Two bottles per show of Tequila – lemon quarters, salt, grenadine and orange juice to make the Sunrises with. Three bottles per show of iced Liebfraumilch. One bottle per show of Courvoisier or Hine brandy. Fresh fruit, cheese, brown bread, butter, cold meat, chicken legs, roast beef, tomatoes, pickles and Alka Seltzer.)

Keith came to the Rotterdam rehearsals with trunkloads of guitars, together with his personal assistant and personal guitar maker, Newman E. Jones III, a young country boy from the Ozark mountains in Arkansas who most of the time wears a straw stetson with a hatband made of rattlesnake skin, killed by Newman Jones III, with the rattle still intact. Keith uses four, sometimes six, guitars on stage – Newman usually has six ready because that's his job – and it seems that Keith has found a need for all these since the arrival of Newman. Newman just says, "Maybe he gits off on what ah do for him, but ah git off on what he does for me." Keith does get off on Newman's work, because he made him his first real five-string guitar. He sat in the Ozarks making it because he knew the sound Keith was getting was from a six string with one string taken off, which is not good for the guitar and also awkward to play. You cannot buy five-string guitars, and very few people play them. Newman Jones II took a youth fare and went to France where he sold the guitar to Keith. The five string is a major part of the secret of Keith's sound.

Photographs by Alain le Garsmeur

I catch Keith as he slopes into the rehearsal hall. He seems to be feverishly counting his guilders. (He carries a cassette machine with weird Reggae music from a 'Rastafarian' band - Jamaican drummers who worship Haile Selassie, smoke a lot of sacramental grass, go deep sea diving, and according to Keith, whom they hired as a guitar player, have firmly captured the imagination of the youth of Jamaica as arch drop-outs.) So I ask him why people can't copy his guitar playing. "They can't," he says. "They don't know how to, although the way I play has just been worked out from other people. Basically what I've done is just taken what a lot of old blues guitarists were doing on acoustic guitars 20 or 30 years ago and transposed it to electric guitar which changes it slightly but still keeps that basic simplicity and straightforwardness." Anyone who is a blues guitar player has done that. So what is the secret? "There's a mixture of technical reasons and personal reasons. I don't mind giving away the technical reasons. I'd tell anybody. I play a lot on a five-string guitar. I use an ordinary six as well but on the stuff which I know most people are talking about, rhythm guitar, I use a five string tuned to an open chord, usually open G. There's open D too. And it's just a matter of learning to play rhythm guitar with that kind of tuning. It's nothing fantastically new. It's the kind of tuning old hicks used to use. It requires a different way of playing.

"I use it on things like *Brown Sugar*, *Down the Line*, *Happy*, *Tumbling Dice*, *Honky Tonk Women* (the essential Rolling Stones). Eighty per cent. of the stuff I play on rhythm guitar I play open G. With an open chord you've got nothing like the music of a sitar - but you've got a drone going all the time. With an open G tuning you can use certain strings throughout a whole song. Because it's an electric guitar they just tend to reverberate all the time behind, so you get a much more solid sound, although in actual fact you've got three less notes than you would have on an ordinary chord on a straight guitar. But the fact that they're all in different octaves just tends to fill out the sound. It's all a matter of spacing; filling in the whole spectrum between what the bass guitar is doing to the highest notes coming out of the piano or lead



"An awful lot of time together" - Mick Jagger and Keith Richard, 1967

guitar. So it fills that whole gap with sound. That's what people are hearing when they say it's funky, or it's ballsy."

Newman Jones knows as much about the technical side as Keith himself because he hides behind Keith's amplifier during the show with a pile of guitars, and after a song, out comes Newman's arm with a new guitar for the next song. In the meantime Newman tunes the guitars with an electric strobe tuner called a 'Strobo' - you don't have to hear the notes, you just watch the dial and when the string is in tune, the line goes still.

Why does Keith need so many guitars? "Oh, he doesn't need so many guitars. He's a guitar freak, like a car freak, or a boat freak," says Newman. All Keith Richard's guitars are old. He plays a 1949 Telecaster and has a collection of Les Paul Gibsons, highly prized by guitar players, and built in the middle Fifties, the vintage years for electric guitars. The Japanese have had to ditch their new models, because everyone was buying second hand. Now they make imitation Les Paul Gibsons. But Keith needs at least four guitars, two five strings, one to be used with a capo (a clamp that alters the pitch of the strings) and one without, and the same for the six strings. And Newman has spare guitars for them all. He has a little box of tools always ready, with a small electric drill, files and saws. Newman according to Keith, has become indispensable.

Another piece of sound equipment not confined to the Stones, but integral to their sound is the extra-

ordinary Leslie - a machine that looks like a large Maples radiogram of the Forties from one side and has a huge cylinder revolving at the bottom, and two cowbell-like objects revolving at the top, all inside the cabinet. It makes the sounds appear to be swishing round the drum as if liquefied. It spreads out the sound, and was used heavily by Keith on their recent album. Mick Taylor has three pedals on the floor: Sustainer, Octivider, and Wa-Wa Pedal. Mick Taylor who is much more of a virtuoso than Keith Richard, in his way, knows his way around the guitar fretboard so well that he can play bottleneck style with a concert tuning. Bottleneck style is like Hawaiian playing - you slide a piece of chrome along the strings rather than press the strings down with your fingers, and unless you play this style with an open tuning, it requires advanced musicianship.

One of the reasons why the Stones worked so hard during the 10 days in Rotterdam for their comeback was that during their last tour they were still trading on the Stones' Golden Age of music. They had the same stage act for three years, all based on music they had recorded in 1968 for their greatest album ever, *Beggar's Banquet*. Those years were good for the Stones, and they wrote *Jumping Jack Flash*, *Street Fighting Man* and *Sympathy for the Devil* all in that one year. Those three songs have made mileage, and two of them had the crowd on their feet at the recent Wembley concert. But in Rotterdam they had to work on some of their new songs with the horn men - and think of a new act.

In the end, give or take a few fashions that the Stones have incorporated, from satanism to revolution, to love and psychedelia, unisex, glitter rock, and back to good old nastiness and menace - all effortlessly catered to - nothing has really changed in their music. The moods are sometimes different. There are variations on the theme and they try to make every album different from the last. But they are still the same musicians, and only play the music they like. So when the Wembley concert came, the new songs were almost like a token to appease the crowd which really wanted to hear the old standards played live again. The Stones have almost become an institution like their former heroes, Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters. But it doesn't look at if there will be a resurgence of the 1968 vintage of writing now, judging by their last two albums, *Exile on Main Street* and the recent release, *Goat's Head Soup*. It's still good music, but not epoch-making like *Beggar's Banquet*.

If they didn't live apart from each other between tours and recording sessions, they would probably have broken up long ago, but their various marriages and separate existences have slowed down their artistic output - partly because Mick and Keith were drifting away from each other. "You do develop in certain ways," says Keith, "with the Stones, it's been kind of strange because you go forward in bursts, then everything stops, you lie fallow for a year or 18 months. Then everything starts to drag itself together again until it's sort of purring like a Rolls-Royce. And then it all just stops. It's strange. The bursts coincide with having to get it together, every now and then, to do something. We all love doing it. But it's impossible to do it all the time. We used to. But then it was just us and a couple of other guys, Oldham and Stu (Ian Stewart). It was very easy to keep that small scale thing on the road all the time. But something that we do now with maybe 50 people involved in putting on a show, it's only something you can sustain for two or three months of the year, because keeping so many people together, keeping them all happy is such a gigantic operation these days. Making an album now is like getting into the movie industry in the Thirties. Making silent movies in the Twenties, reel them off in a week. And slowly you get ➡➡➡

1975 ST

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 Kemp & Partners Ltd., 11, Sherborne Road, Yeovil.
STAFFORDSHIRE
 James Brantlett Ltd., 71-73, Victoria Street, Wolverhampton.
 Wm. Perryng Ltd., 25, School Street, Wolverhampton.
STIRLINGSHIRE
 Graham & Morton, Dumbarton Road, Stirling.
 Knowles the Furnishers, 15, Maxwell Place, Stirling.
SURREY
 Harveys of Camberley, Park Street, Camberley.
 John Jeffries & Holly Parade, High Street, Cobham.
 John Perryng Ltd., Park Street, Croydon.
 Shekars & Oxford Ltd., 16, Katherine Street, Croydon.
 W. J. Robins, 224, High Street, Dorking.
 P. Head & Sons Ltd., 30, High Street, Epsom.
 Maples & Co. Ltd., Church Street, Epsom.
 Farshaw Carpet Co., West Street, Farnham.
 John Perryng Ltd., 35, High Street, Guildford.
 Maples & Co. Ltd., North Street, Guildford.
 Wm. Harveys of Guildford Ltd., High Street, Guildford.
 Bentalls Ltd., Fife Road, Kingston-on-Thames.
 John Perryng Ltd., Eton Street, Kingston-on-Thames.
 Enfield House, 10, Church Street, Leatherhead.
 Harthover & Sons, Bell Street, Reigate.
 Maples & Co. Ltd., The Quadrant, Richmond.
 Prater Ltd., 270, The Quadrant, Richmond.
 Peter Lawrence (Hornsey The Carpet House), 41, Victoria Road, Surbiton.
 Ames Reynolds Ltd., 81, High Street, Sutton.
 J. E. Freeman & Co., New Zealand Avenue, Walton-on-Thames.
 Walton Carpets, 44, Church Street, Walton-on-Thames.
 Walcott Interiors Ltd., 8, Temple Market, Weybridge.
 Home Design Centre, Hyde House, Clapham Road, Woking.
 John Perryng Ltd., 39, Goldmoor Road, Woking.
 Maples & Co. Ltd., Commercial Road, Woking.
SUSSEX
 Dodson Bull Carpet Co. Ltd., 2-5, North Road, Brighton.
 John Bentalls Holdings Ltd., 143, North Street, Brighton.
 Gainsborough, Upper St. James Street, Brighton 7.
 The Flooring People, Goldfields Ltd., 22, Bedford Place, Brighton.
 Hazzards Ltd., Prospect House, Burgess Hill.
 J. D. Merrant Ltd., West Street, Chichester.
 John Perryng Ltd., Broad Walk, Crawley.
 John Perryng Ltd., 21, North Street, Chichester.
 Rowden Bros., 83, London Road, East Grinstead.
 J. E. Freeman (Watson), Springfield Road, Horsham.
 Maples & Co. Ltd., Western Road, Hove.
 V. Brand (Carpets) Ltd., 25A, High Street, Lewes.
 Courts Carpets, 71, High Street, Uckfield.
 John Perryng Ltd., Chapel Road, Worthing.
WARWICKSHIRE
 Dodson Bull Ltd., 104, Edmond Street, Birmingham 5.
 Leo Longland & Co. Ltd., Broad Street, Birmingham.
 Maples & Co. Ltd., 150, Corporation Street, Birmingham.
 Open One (Bedford & Jenkins), Suffolk Street, Birmingham.
 Rothmans (Hornsey), Corporation Street, Birmingham 2.
 J. Aspinall Ltd., 10, High Street, Coventry.
 Lancaster House Ltd., 10, Spencer Street, Leamington Spa.
 John Lewis & Sons, 25, Albert Street, Rugby.
 Keen & Scott Ltd., 84, Station Road, Solihull.
WESTMORLAND
 Hughes, Finkle Street, Kendal.
WILTSHIRE
 Shepherd & Hodger Ltd., High Street, Salisbury.
 Southern & Co. Ltd., Catherine Street, Salisbury.
 J. C. Gilbert Ltd., 1, Newport Street, Swindon.
 H. K. Chapman & Co. Ltd., Trowbridge.
WORCESTERSHIRE
 County Carpets Ltd., Blackfriars Square, Worcester.
 Russell & Dorell Ltd., High Street, Worcester.
YORKSHIRE
 Wilford Ltd., Tharpe Arch, Trading Estate, Boston Spa.
 Dreyfus & Co. Ltd., Market Street, Bradford.
 Bamsons & Co. Ltd., James Street, Harrogate.
 Maples & Co. Ltd., Alliance Street, Leeds.
 Peacock & Son Ltd., The Meadows, Leeds.
 East Riding Furn. Co., Anlaby Road, Hull.
 Hazzards Ltd., Paragon Square, Hull.
 Rowles & Co. Ltd., Alliance Street, Harrogate.
 Peacock & Son Ltd., The Meadows, Leeds.
 Scholfield (Lancs) Ltd., The Woodhouse, Leeds.
 T. G. Cookhouse Ltd., Angel Street, Sheffield.
 Cole Bros Ltd., Barkers Pool, Sheffield.
 Shape Designs (Contracts) Ltd., Currier Street, Sheffield.
 Hunter & Smallpage Ltd., 57, Goodramgate, York.
 Hazzards, 95, Middle Gate, York.
 Whitty Oliver & Sons Ltd., Micklegate, York.

these huge machines and organisations involved because there's lots of money - that's probably the biggest reason - and all these new posts are created for people."

The show almost ground to a halt in the South of France, where they made *Exile on Main Street* last summer. Their separate houses were hundreds of miles apart. Bianca Jagger was having her baby in Paris. No adequate recording studio or engineer could be found in France, nor even an empty house, and they finally set up in the basement of Keith's villa. "It was difficult," said Keith, "a couple of us would be in a room here, and somebody would be through that door, and the piano would be in another room again, and everything co-ordinated through the truck (The Mighty Mobile - the Stones' recording van. Jagger has it camouflaged like an army truck and it is stacked with £55,000 worth of equipment; an IBM 16-track with a rack of Dolbys, and then limiters, phasers, closed-circuit TV, air conditioners, four huge speakers, and a control desk with 882 buttons to work with) which would be outside.

Bill Wyman wouldn't arrive until midnight, because he lived so far away. Keith would spend two hours putting Marlon, his four-year-old son, to bed. Everyone got tired. Jagger went away to Paris to be with Bianca for three weeks.

The whole operation took four months, and had a very strong Keith Richard influence. Because it was his house he would be downstairs and working before anyone else and everyone would start playing Keith's arrangements. In the end they produced so much material that it became a double album, but nobody likes it very much in the Stones' entourage. It is associated with the general feeling of fiasco about the trip to France.

"Keith has really emerged as leader musically," said one of the Stones' aides. "The shape of the song tends to go Keith's way. Although they're close, he and Mick, I don't think they're as close as they used to be. It used to be that Mick and Keith would spend an awful lot of time together as friends, so songs would appear on cassette machines after spending two or three nights at each other's house. Either that or a lot of songs get written while on tour." (*Satisfaction* was written in Clearwater, Florida, and Keith, who

made up the riff, thought Jagger was joking when he said it would make a good single.) "But they tend to live a long way apart now and what they'll do is bring along finished ideas and modify things until they suit each other."

Goat's Head Soup was, however, a real departure from the old rock and boogie. The Stones have all suddenly become versatile musicians. Jagger plays both piano and rhythm guitar on the album and Keith Richard plays bass. There are only three tracks of old Stones: *Star, Star, Dancing With Mr D.* and *Silver Train*, the rest are slow, ballad and relaxed, with fancy flute work, strings and horns. Keith untypically plays very melodic guitar. Mick Taylor stars on lead guitar. Everyone is experimenting with sounds and looking for a kind of musical perfection they never used to worry about (although Bill Wyman was wiped off quite a few tracks because his bass was *out of tune*). It was recorded in a studio in Jamaica. "It was a really primitive old place," said Andy Johns, the Stones' 23-year-old recording engineer. "They'd just got a 16 track. The mixer and recording equipment were very basic. No limiters or anything. It didn't matter. The room was so good and it was that which really affected the music." They cut the whole record in three weeks working 12 hours a day.

"The only thing that makes one thing different from another," says Keith, "is that we never cut our stuff in the same place. You automatically get a different sound. The actual sound is just evolving. I don't know whether it's evolving, revolving, or devolving. I just stick to what I know." Before the Wembley comeback, which seemed to suggest that the Stones could go on for as long as they like, I asked Mick Jagger whether something was dying in rock, whether the Woodstock days were over. "Rock is starting to get like Jazz," he said. "Where people wouldn't listen to anything after 1929 and some people wouldn't listen to anything after the war. I don't believe that each era is its own. The era of Woodstock . . . never passed. I never imagine myself as part of Woodstock or anything like it. But music's just a changing thing. Nothing's over. Music is not over, nor any particular kind of it. Nor its heyday" ●

