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The Rolling Stones: Under Review 1962-1966 (Sexy Intellectual Production)

The format of these “Under Review” rock bios is fairly rigid: We get a chronological overview of a fixed number of years during an artist’s career, covering the albums released during that span. A panel of “experts” comprised of friends, bandmates, (usually of the peripheral variety) roadies and whatever British journalist was a few shillings short on the rent that week, weigh in with observations, analysis and rhapsodic praise. There is a narrator that pops in from time to time, the frequency generally based on the quality of the commentary (i.e., dull commentary means more narrator). And most importantly for band fans, there is archival band footage that (hopefully) hasn’t already been splashed all over the place in previous bio attempts.

“The Rolling Stones: Under Review” is one of the better collections for a number of reasons. First, the commentary is first-rate, thanks to the participation of former Stones bassist (way back when) and Pretty Things guitarist Dick Taylor, as well as usual suspects Melody Maker scribe Chris Welch and rock historian/writer Alan Clayson. It’s Clayson who insists that the Stones were one of the first bands to make a true album—a thoughtful assemblage of songs that stood together in a meaningful way—as opposed to merely sticking the latest single on as the opening cut of a full-length LP, followed by a load of tossed-off rubbish.

The early footage of the nascent Stones is scintillating, with great clips from “Ready Steady Go” and “Shindig.” The band’s version of “Little Red Rooster” (originally performed by their hero Howlin’ Wolf) is spellbinding, with Mick Jagger eschewing his usual faux James Brown dance steps in order to fix the camera with his most devastating “come hither” stare. And there’s handsome Brian Jones, the band’s driving force in the group’s formative years, playing fiery harmonica and slide guitar and even singing backup, full of vim and vigor. The devastation of doubt and drugs wouldn’t demolish him for another year or two, and it’s refreshing to see the towheaded guitarist in his functional prime. An essential add for any Stones junkie. (John Chandler)