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DVD Review: The Rolling Stones 1969-1974: The Mick Taylor Years

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“Everyone talks about rock these days; the problem is they forget about the roll.” — Keith Richards

My friend Dave Marsh, a longtime rock critic, who is also heard on Sirius Radio, always seems to hit the nail on the head. A few months ago, Dave offered me this bit of wisdom, and it sums up virtually everything that is wrong with this film: "Most music critics hate rock and roll."

In the wake of the success of the 40th anniversary reissue of The Rolling Stones' *Exile On Main St.* by Universal Music Group, and the critically acclaimed "making of" documentary, *Stones In Exile*, others are now trying to capitalize on the hype. Out this week, *The Rolling Stones 1969-1974: The Mick Taylor Years* is a dreary disappointment.

This DVD isn't about "Wild Horses," as much as it is about high horses. Given its title, the film is presumably about Mick Taylor, right? Think again. With the exception of British blues musician John Mayall and pedal steel player Al Perkins, most of this film is really about the rock critics themselves who were interviewed for the film.

The title of the DVD is highly misleading. Again, this film isn't really so much about the Rolling Stones or about Mick Taylor, as much as it is about the rock critics who infused way too much of their overblown egos as they relentlessly expose their self-inflated opinions of themselves into the mix. In the mind of the producer of this swill and the critics that were interviewed, their opinions of the band were more important than facts. Their likes and dislikes become the centerpiece of the film, rather than The Rolling Stones or Mick Taylor.

Being that I own likely every commercially released Rolling Stones album and DVD, and also some (okay, many) bootlegs, I was amazed that someone could actually make the topic of The Rolling Stones as tedious as is this film, which is heavily dependent on the ramblings and overblown self-importance of the rock critics it features. Mick Taylor is a world-class guitarist, and his years with The Rolling Stones culminated in a brilliant period for the band. Given this, it was stunning to me that someone could manage to make such a mess out of putting together a film about those years, and could actually succeed in making it so mind-numbingly tiresome.

The poor production quality of the DVD is distracting. All of the historical facts offered in the film have already been told countless times, and certainly better. There is scant footage of Taylor, and very little of the rest of the band, other than promotional videos and clips borrowed from *Gimme Shelter* by the Maysles brothers, Albert and David. A

few of gifted photographer Dominique Tarle's exquisite photographs are seen in the film, but they are much better displayed in works like *Stones In Exile*.

Surprisingly, it had apparently not occurred to the creators of this film that most Stones fans would already own *Stones in Exile*, or that the fans would already know enough about the band to not need having the basic details of *Nellcôte* and *Altamont* dryly spoon-fed to them yet again, particularly in such an unpalatable way. As the film progresses, the viewer is bombarded with an increasing number of daft and often ridiculous opinions. Much of the discussion about *Nellcôte* in *The Rolling Stones 1969-1974: The Mick Taylor Years* is laced with conjecture and speculation. Haven't we already gotten enough of that on the Internet fan sites?

Maybe you think I'm just jaded about The Rolling Stones and that's why I was bored. You couldn't be more wrong. Still, I needed to take several breaks in order to continue being subjected to the tiresome task of watching and listening to the monotonously dull and uninspired blatherings of rock critics Barney Hoskyns, Robert Christgau, and Nigel Williamson. I would have likely been less bored had I been locked in my hallway, and forced to stare at my Rolling Stones 1972 *Winterland "Tumbling Dice"* tour poster for the 99 minutes it took to be inflicted with this lifeless piece of drudgery.

With those years having been such an important zenith for The Stones, it's illogical to have not have had more about the band itself rather than solely the usual clichés.

The journalists drooling over themselves in the film is more than a bit tedious. It would have been wiser to include more of The Rolling Stones, themselves, and less of these rock critics spewing the same stories that have been repeated too many times and vomiting their opinions. Why do these guys think people care about their opinions to the extent that they comprise so much of the material? The self-importance of it becomes unnerving.

The reasons given for their condemnations often blatantly contradict each other. Referring to *Nellcôte* as "wretched excess," and lauding the album, while praising the masterpiece work *Sticky Fingers*, yet blaming their dislike of subsequent albums they don't like on Richards' drug use, entirely defies logic.

Both Bianca Jagger's first and maiden names are mispronounced.

Rock critic Nigel Williamson is often entirely petty, sounding like a jilted lover. One chapter in the documentary, which slags guitarist Keith Richards, is snidely titled "The Drugs Don't Work."

Delivering judgments that include saying that the album *Goat's Head Soup* indicates that the band "had become a pop act" is cretinous. "Star Star" a pop track? "Silver Train?" Huh?

"I don't like the lyrics, I don't like the melody..." Who frigging cares? Referring to Jagger as "self-conscious" for having recorded "Star Star," well, how could the band not do an ode to groupies? It would have been entirely disingenuous at that point not to.

How do these critics not get it? I refer back to what Dave Marsh had said to me.

How full of themselves are these guys? In Thomas Arnold's narration of the story line in the film, we hear, "The band was satisfied, but the critics were unconvinced." How over-inflated are these guys' egos to make themselves and their opinions a driving part of the story line of the band's history in the narrative? This is not a documentary about the Stones, but a documentary showcasing the critics' own views about the band and their music.

We also get this quote: "I don't favor" [the album] It's Only Rock and Roll." Why do these guys think the viewers give rat's ass that they don't like it? I thought this was going to be about Mick Taylor. Instead, these guys made a film about themselves.

As far as the three "extras" that are on the DVD, one is titled "Meeting Mick Taylor," and one is a list of the other films made by its producer. What else is included among the extras the DVD has to offer? You guessed it — "Contributors' Biographies," where we can get yet more information about the rock critics that were interviewed in the film.