

their UK tax bills and Richards' drug woes grew too large. Contemporary interviews find Wyman, Richards, Jagger and Watts whining about how the taxman made them go into "exile." Taylor, in contrast, wittily says, "I hadn't earned enough money to have tax problems." But if this was exile, it was a soft one, cushioned by money, drugs and pliable hangers-on, and it only lasted three months (June-September 1971).

Had the resultant album, most of which was recorded during that span, not been so phenomenally good, such retrospective whining would grate. As it is, the boys come off as slightly dotty old men racking their brains about something they were too stoned to remember clearly. Indeed, the best parts of *Stones in Exile* are the interviews with producer Jimmy Miller and engineer Andy Johns, the real heroes of the story, who seem to have almost total recall. Not only were they working on Richards' unpredictable schedule ("We might not work for two days and then work two days straight"), they were up against an old, dingy, unventilated space in which the electricity kept going out. Wyman's bass amp was in the hall, Watts' drums lodged in a coal bunker, sidemen Bobby Keys, Jim Price and Nicky Hopkins squeezed in here and there, Jagger and Richards not exactly "interfacing," and everybody but Richards ready to go home.

One thing is clear: The resultant album absorbed the ramshackle surroundings and the raunchy ambience, which probably explains why it still sounds so great. In the huge shadow cast by the Stones' legend, one tends to forget how such songs as "Ventilator Blues," "Loving Cup," "All Down the Line," "Rock This Joint," "Happy" and "Tumbling Dice" have aged better than most of the music that came afterward. Also, despite the debauchery and chaos going on upstairs in Nellcote (see Robert Greenfield's *A Season in Hell* for details), the band worked hard to produce what might be the Ur-punk album. Released in 1972, *Exile* was panned by critics but took

on a life of its own.

Some of the "dark stuff" sneaks in despite the best efforts of Jagger to tamp it down by including worshipful gushings from Benicio del Toro, Will.i.am and Sheryl Crow—irrelevant interviews that unnecessarily pad out the 63 minutes. The only contemporary young voice registering any sort of caution or substance is Jack Weber, who as a child watched his mom and dad, the swinging London sycophants Tommy and Susan Weber (subjects of Greenfield's *A Day in the Life*), as they did coke, smack, Jack Daniels and other things in his presence.

The other bonus material is slim, just extended interviews the best parts of which were used in the film; the packaging is nonexistent, not even a few liner notes, just some uncaptioned photos. A golden opportunity to offer fans a special item seems to have been squandered here. (Alan Bisbort)

THE ROLLING STONES - 1969-1974 - The Mick Taylor Years (Sexy Intellectual)

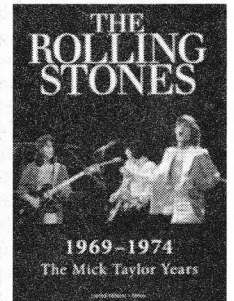
A story circulated in London last summer that Mick Jagger had asked Mick Taylor to rejoin the Stones as a replacement for the latter's own replacement, Ronnie Wood. The story claimed that Woody was no longer a Stones' asset as a result of his heavy boozing and a much-publicized street brawl with his 42 years younger Russian girlfriend. The fact that the two Micks had just renewed their work relationship, cleaning up bonus material for the *Exile on Main Street* reissue, made the story seem plausible, assuming one had somehow failed to notice that the reams of previous bad press never got Keith Richards booted from the Stones during his junkie years. Needless to say the lineup switch hasn't happened.

In Richards' very readable *Life* bestseller, Keef says having Taylor in the Stones was a great thing the first time around. "You write with Mick Taylor in mind,

maybe without realizing it, knowing he can come up with something different...Some of the *Sticky Fingers* compositions were rooted in that fact that I knew Taylor was going to pull something great." Certainly anyone who has attended a Rolling Stones concert in the last 35 or so years will have noted that the band's playlist is still pretty much rooted in the Taylor years.

Sexy Intellectual's new DVD on the Taylor era does a fair job covering this last indisputably great Stones period. There are many brief clips from live performances, courtesy Abkco and EMI, and interesting gab from notable talking heads, including early Taylor mentor John Mayall, musicians Al Perkins and Bill Plummer who played on *Exile*, Brit critics Barney Hoskyns of *Rock's Back Pages* and Nigel Williamson from *Uncut*, Stones biographers Robert Greenfield and Alan Clayson, as well as the self-appointed "Dean of American Critics" Robert Christgau who does his usual schoolmarm-issuer-of-letter-grades routine.

The first 20 minutes of *The Mick Taylor Years* does a fine job of recapping how the then 20-year-old guitarist came into the band as Brian Jones' replacement, making his first public appearance at the Hyde Park memorial two days after Brian's death. A slightly nervous-on-camera John Mayall explains how he came to recommend Taylor to Jagger. The narration then focuses on Taylor's contributions to *Sticky Fingers*, which Hoskyns believes is the Stones' greatest achievement, the album wherein they mutated from a bad-boy pop group (antithesis of the Beatles) to the acknowledged "World's Greatest Rock & Roll Band" and ushered in the era of big arena tours.



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