



## Under Review: 1975 - 1983: The Ronnie Wood Years (Pt.1)

### [The Rolling Stones](#)

*Sexy Intellectual - SIDVD575 (DVD)*

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange  
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When Mick Taylor stepped in to fill the deceased Brian Jones' huge shoes, we saw the band undergo yet another transition. Though *Satanic Majesty's Request* was a magnificent effort and should have done far better than it did, enjoying a saner acceptance now all these years later, Paul Gambaccini put it best in this new *Sexy Intellectual* documentary: "The Stones just didn't cope with 1967. They were not a peace and love group." Taylor re-anchored the gritty blues side of the lads, re-steering Jones' old wide-ranging sophistications back into the estimable group's staples. Thus, when Taylor suddenly quit the band, it shocked everyone, including Jagger. The reasons for the departure are avoided here, as everywhere, but they're pretty obvious. The quiet, good-looking, naïf-ish Other Mick was not the outrageous gutter-snipe that Jagger and Richards were, the brazen bad boys Cockneying their guff in your face. The Stones led legendary flamboyant existences; Taylor was a true musician and then some. The leavetaking really wasn't as surprising as it appeared. Enter Ronnie 'Wild Man' Wood.

Stepping out of the equally cocked-up Faces, a band that was in many ways the Stones writ smaller, Wood was the sort of perfect choice only Nostradamus could've prognosticated correctly. In hindsight, the slot-in was inevitable, but, before it actually came to pass, no one had predicted the move. Still, fans and critics waited nervously for what would manifest in the music. Interestingly, the touchstone hadn't been Jagger, who was always abreast of things, but Keith, Richards and Woody were, as one critic puts it, "playmates". In view of Keef's hard-living lifestyle, one needn't think too long to understand what that meant. However, as Ronnie's brother Art explained, from the moment Ron heard his first Stones 45, he knew he was destined to be in the group one day. He was proven right.

As one would expect, *The Ronnie Wood Years* is a combination of LP reviews, performance analyses, history, and gossip, all of it well paced and engaging. The treasury of photos, clips, and whatnots are gratifying even to the most hard-core fan, and the critics' input is, for the most part, cogent, revelatory, insightful...though Christgau is, per usual, not really commenting but selling Robert Christgau, trying to appear eccentric while, in reality, a stodgy college professor.

Barney Hoskyns, on the other hand, is as gritty a crit as Jagger's band is a working unit, and he provides a critical anti-herd factor. When claiming that the choice of Wood was "disappointing" and lazy, he's absolutely right...but also wrong. What he wanted was what we all wanted: another Jones or Taylor, but that's not what Jagger or the band had in mind, Hoskyns claims "To this day, I can't tell you what he's doing in the Stones...with no real style of his own at all", and it's a brilliantly honest assessment, one any other scribe might flinch at putting into words but would, at least over a pint and away from the spotlight, readily admit to. That this sort of contrast appears in any documentary is crucial, and it emblemizes that one can trust the production agency not to pander to social mechanisms but emit a balanced assessment from those able to render it.

Also shown is Jagger's nervous rivalry with David Bowie, who put the sweat on the grand master like no one else. Wood may have re-grounded the group but now came Billy Preston and Ollie Brown, chosen fo' da funk, to spice up the live work. It worked, and thus Woods' oft manic energies were well complemented...and some of the stuff he was doing on-stage has to be seen to be believed (a couple of instances of which are shown in the opening minutes). Narrator Thomas Arnold rightly cites the Stones' live work as having been "lackluster", and, though heresy to utter, it's the truth. As an avid concert hound in the 70s, I never bothered with Stones concerts because their live LPs were so pitiful, but when Mick chose the right sidemen, it could be magic. Thus, when the Steel Wheels tour erupted, and I was informed Chuck Leavell would be a part of the band, I bought a ticket and trotted on down to the L.A. Colosseum. The gig was magnificent. Of course, having Living Colour and Guns & Roses open didn't hurt either. But Ron Wood was in many ways the perfect center between the trad Stones unit and the add-ons, the hinge in the door that made everything so much smoother. Hoskyns was correct that the guy did not stand out but he was precisely what kept the group exactly where Jagger wanted it.

This hypnotic presentation is two hours long and constitutes only Part 1, so, God willing and the creek don't rise, there will be a Part 2 as well. By now, I probably sound like a broken record, but the SI label is a force to be contended with, its imprint a stamp of quality. With any luck at all, the extremely pleasing stream of issuances from them will continue unabated for a very long time to come...and...and...and, hey SI guys, what is progrock? Chopped liver? C'mon!!! We're dying for someone to issue a King Crimson rock disk on the most criminally underappreciated band on planet Earth (hiat hiat hiat!!!)

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