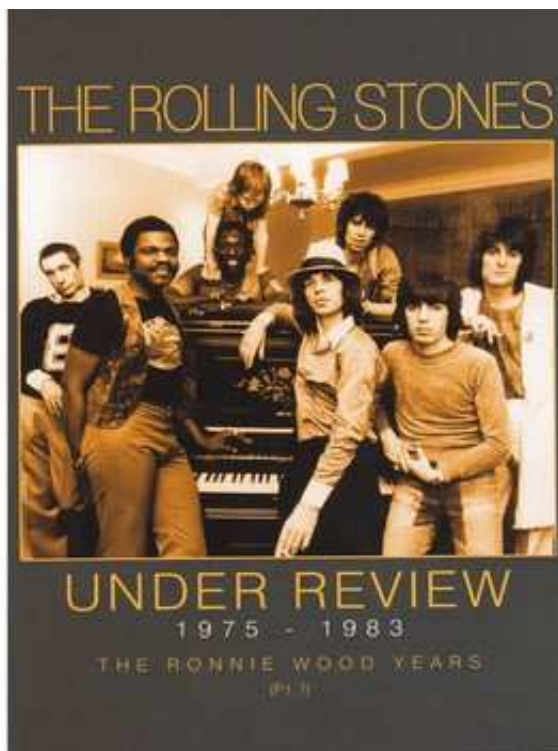


Documentary DVD examines Rolling Stones' work in the Seventies

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New documentary examines Stones' work in the Seventies
Credits: Sexy Intellectual

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RATING FOR ROLLING STONES UNDER REVIEW 1975-1983 DVD



The [Rolling Stones](http://www.examiner.com/topic/rolling-stones)

<http://www.examiner.com/topic/rolling-stones>) were in dire straits by the mid-1970s, commercially and artistically, having lost some of their relevance and—for the second time—a lead guitarist. Responsible for so much of the group’s early songs (and sound) founding member Brian Jones died in 1969. His replacement, Mick Taylor, contributed to the classics Sticky Fingers and Exile on Main St. but had flown the coup by '74.

The effortless induction of Faces guitarist Ronnie Wood into to the mix galvanized the Stones for the next phase in their still-unfolding career. Having joined The Beatles in setting the benchmark for what pop music could achieve, the group now had to compete with musical up-and-comers from

around the globe. Glam, progressive, and hard rock were in the fore, with disco and punk soon to upset the ever-churning waters. New albums and tours by David Bowie, Led Zeppelin, Aerosmith, Judas Priest, Queen, Pink Floyd, Yes and AC/DC garnered as much attention as any new material by [Mick Jagger \(http://www.examiner.com/topic/mick-jagger\)](http://www.examiner.com/topic/mick-jagger) and the boys.

Goat's Head Soup and It's Only Rock 'n Roll were warmly received but didn't have the impact of earlier Stones releases. Still, with The Beatles kaput, flower power wilting, and the triumvirate of Hendrix, Joplin, and Morrison prematurely interred, The Rolling Stones were second to none on stage. Every show of every tour was newsworthy regardless of what they'd been churning out on vinyl.

"That stuff about them being the greatest rock and roll band ever...that was about their live performance," says New York Times arts critic Anthony DeCurtis.

DeCurtis is just one of many journalists offering his two cents on the latest Stones documentary DVD from Sexy Intellectual. Following on the heels of *The Rolling Stones Under Review: 1967-1969* comes *The Rolling Stones Under Review: 1975-1983*. Subtitled *The Ronnie Wood Years*, the new two-hour video critique follows the band's troubled trajectory from 1976's *Black and Blue* through 1983's *Undercover*.

Some compelling arguments arise regarding the band's Seventies output. Melody Maker's Barney Hoskyns dismisses Wood as an "indistinguishable" guitarist and suggests the band might've found a better replacement for Taylor. BBC Radio's "Professor of Pop" Paul Gambaccini and "Dean of Rock Critics" Robert Christgau note that Jagger became increasingly hip to musical trends and—with partner Keith Richards sidelined by drugs—was more keen to follow rather than set them if doing so kept the band from disintegrating.

Early discussion pertaining to the years 1969-74 brings viewers up to speed, with old reels from high-profile gigs at Hyde Park and Altamont Speedway showing a boyish Taylor scorching on his Les Paul. We tiptoe through Taylor LPs like *Let It Bleed*, *Sticky Fingers*, and *Exile* to arrive in what was for the band uncharted territory. A stopgap Atlantic Records compilation *Made in the Shade* was released to buy the band time to consider its options. Keyboard-playing emcee Billy Preston accompanied the Stones on tour, funk up the live show with boogie pianist Ian Stewart, but many felt Jagger and company were on cruise control, mimicking styles popularized by Stevie Wonder, George Clinton, Sly and The Family Stone, and Kool & The Gang. Even on good nights the Stones couldn't match the edginess they'd achieved with Jones, nor were they as musically competent as on their dates with the fleet-fingered Taylor. Bad nights were, well...bad—and the documentary's academics don't hold back when it comes to panning theatrical gimmicks like Jagger's giant inflatable phallus.

"I got a sense they were just marking time," Gambaccini says of *Black and Blue*, the transition record that found Jagger and Richards cobbling together a new album out of auditions for the vacancy left by Taylor. American guitarists Wayne Perkins and Harvey Mandel appeared on the LP, but it was fellow Brit Wood—who'd lent his guitar skills to reggae-influenced tracks like "Hey Negrita" and funky Eric Donaldson cover "Cherry Oh Baby"—that got the nod.

Wood became Richards' new playmate, says Mojo scribe Mark Paytress. The DVD treats viewers to archival footage of Ronnie (then and now) expressing how he'd always felt it was his "destiny to be a Rolling Stone." Those not intimately familiar with the Stones couldn't tell the difference on record or even in photos: With his dark haystack hair and sunken British cheeks, Wood sort of looked like Richards and (per Christgau) committed the group to "that scruffy thing they already had." He was

already accustomed to playing second fiddle to Jeff Beck and Rod Stewart in The Faces, and thus wasn't compelled to vie for spotlight time with either of his Glimmer Twin employers. Heck, Wood was even on good terms with his predecessor; Taylor appeared on his first solo album.

The video pundits laud the Stones' return to form with Wood on 1978's *Some Girls*, which featured the "Miss You" and "Shattered" alongside slinky guitar track "Beast of Burden." Harmonica player James "Sugar Blue" Whiting recalls his time in studio blowing harp for the band, and how playing with the Stones gave him an in with his young nephews.

"[Ronnie] imbued the Stones with the vitality they'd been missing for a long time," surmises Sugar.

But Jagger's determination to stay in lockstep with other bands would be thwarted by a detoxified (for now) Richards, who'd narrowly escaped prison after a heroin bust in '77. Keith still wanted to keep things soulful, roots-based and not a little uppity, and only begrudgingly contributed to tracks on 1980's *Emotional Rescue*. Critics on the DVD cite the Richards-penned ballad "All About You" as that disc's sole standout, apart from the dance-ready title cut.

The filmmakers examine how the band defused the tension surrounding its next LP by not writing one at all. Having rifled through the vaults, producer Chris Kimsey presented Jagger and Richards with a batch of demo tapes filled with cast-offs and works-in-progress that could—with a little TLC—be finished. The resulting album, 1981's *Tattoo You*, was a bold rock statement at a time when keyboard-based acts crowded MTV. "Start Me Up" was Richards' best hook since "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," and for a spell it seemed the Stones weren't simply going through the motions.

"Mick was always listening for what's going on now," says Paytress. "He didn't want to be left behind."

Accordingly, 1983's *Undercover* fused beat beats, swirling synths, overdriven guitars, and provocative lyrics about the CIA's secret death squads in South America ("Undercover of the Night"). But the accompanying videos were lost in a saturated market ruled by Michael Jackson, Prince, and The Police. The disc's speakers surmise that the younger generation just didn't latch onto the 40-year old Jagger and Richards the way their parents had a decade prior. Consequently, the Stones would focus on touring, issuing the odd album during the '90s and '00s more as excuses to hit the road than culture-shaping artistic statements.

Under Review: 1975-1983 is a fascinating, thought-provoking look back at an underappreciated era in The Rolling Stones' legacy whose many insights prompt the audience to bust out their record collections for further scrutiny. The detailed chronology (and wealth of concert and video footage) render it a useful historical document, while the criticism and commentary—offered by journalists who were active in the Seventies—shed light on lesser-known aspects of Lapping Tongue lore.

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