

ROLLING STONES AND THE MAKING OF LET IT BLEED

(part 6 in the VINYL FRONTIER series)

by Sean Egan

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Fancy Words Blues, this ‘un. Wading through the first few pages I context-learned a whole new bloody vocabulary! This wordsmith means business when he’s tickling his Qwerty. But when it all boils down, what *do* we have? Are they words of wonder expanding the Stones’ scripted canon or just a regurgitated pile of drivel for a fast buck?

So...what has been unearthed from underneath these rolled out Rolling Stones years all the way back to the latter Banquet/Bleed-part of the band’s formative glory years where some of the main session’s players have by now departed to the great jam session up above? Stu, Nicky Hopkins, Jack Nitzsche and Jimmy Miller – all names of rather elusive key players that throughout the years have shone on Stones albums. Names heralded in liner notes and biographies alike, seemingly ultimately making a distinct mark on the development of the greatest band in the world, strongly and ably supporting the band’s unique musical course.

A tantalising thought, writing an ultimate account on the *Let It Bleed* album; sandwiched between the classic comeback kick-start of *Beggars Banquet*, in fact its twin album, and the ultimate completion of a fantastic foursome album-run by the *Sticky Fingers* and *Exile On Main Street* LPs. Yes, I guess the *Let It Bleed* album is indeed that catalyst between the four, withering between the dark bluesy moodscape, the plucky country pickings, the ‘Hard Rock’ side of things, the innovative try-out “larger than life” numbers, but above all: that earthy identity that is the Rolling Stones - a unique brand. It’s almost as if there’s an extra hand conducting....

Sean Egan has done a good enough job as one could do on this one. He applies a knowledgeable style throughout and marries intriguing facts and possible fiction in an acceptable way. And new facts - and plausible opinions - there are, so Stones fans across the world should be satisfied with a collation of comments this time around by the likes of Bill Wyman, Greil Marcus, Al Kooper, George Chkiantz, Dave Hassinger and Keith Altham. Andrew Oldham helped out, as did mega-Stones fans Nico Zentgraf, Christian Menicou and Felix Aepli. But why didn’t he ask us??

The book offers a complete package raising its subject and leaves no stone unturned. The album is scrutinised from all possible points of view: musically, historically, personally and technically. It provides a nice way of looking closely, in great detail and from every angle at a snapshot in the band's ever so long run. As a Stones fan you don't need to wade through the whole hog once again and that makes this paperback a more pleasant reading experience.

Al Kooper and George Chkiantz give invaluable insights. Between them they demystify the album's producer Jimmy Miller's hand in the production completely, pointing out that he wasn't the best man for the job as he was a Stones fan not able to contradict anything and very much let Mick and Keith just get on with it.

Well, there goes my perceived idea of "the Jimmy Miller" years where Stones LPs are concerned! Also the drumming on **You Can't Always Get What You Want** is being shed in a different light as judged by French horn player par excellence Al Kooper: "Charlie was having difficulty playing the part that he wanted him to play so Jimmy said, 'Can I sit at the drums for a minute and I'll show you exactly what it is.' And he sat down and he played it for Charlie and Charlie said, 'Well, why don't you just play it?' and didn't play drums on the take. He did it with no emotion whatsoever but I thought it was a terrible thing that Jimmy Miller did because at the time I was a producer and I would never do that, especially to someone so immensely talented".

Thankfully, Egan's research throws up Charlie's counter point of view to balance things out nicely and quotes him saying: "Jimmy actually made me stop and think again about the way I played drums in the studio and I became a much better drummer in the studio thanks to him".

With Jimmy Miller seemingly not really in control, George Chkiantz remembers an anecdote that illustrates the Jagger-Richards production axis at the time: "(...) I can remember Keith lying behind the desk at Olympic apparently asleep. Mick was going on about trying to get somebody to play something or other. This one eye suddenly opened like a lizard and Keith said, 'No', and suddenly it was all forgotten".

On the down side (and yes, we'll always find one!) there are some holes to pick. We have one rather odd and very insensitive remark on page 106: "The pregnant Pallenberg had begun bleeding and persuaded a doctor to give her a shot of morphine, much to the envy of the smack-dabbling Richards and Faithfull". On pages 113-114 Sean Egan naively suggests that some people might blame

Mick's attitude and his tongue-in-cheek pooh-poohing of the Jamming With Edward album ("I hope you spend longer listening to this record than we did making it") to spark off the punk movement. Never mind any socio-political issues! And then there's the overt eagerness by the author to point out detail, often repeating facts and opinions or simply having someone like engineer Alan O'Duffy describing a cow bell on page 120 as: "...a wedge-shaped metal enclosure. It perhaps is four inches across, two inches deep, made out of tin or some sort of light steel. Sometimes it has a handle on the back end ..." etcetera for a stunning further 12 lines!

So there we have it – an altogether decent delve into the band's back catalogue, highlighting that album of all albums: *Let It Bleed*. Enjoy the read, even though you might need to get used to its style. To give you a taster, this comes off page 61: "The Stones were as incensed as any figurehead for the new generation would be when stymied by a plank of the censorious and starchy age group whose values they wished to overthrow". - Jaap Hoeksma