

## TOUR OF THE AMERICAS (TOTA)

By CHRISTOPHER SIMON SYKES

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Aah... the Rolling Stones' 1975 Tour of the Americas: my all-time favourite tour for a canon of reasons. Musically not at all perfect - with Mick Taylor missing in action and new boy Ronnie Wood on loan from the Faces, but we have so much entertainment added to the production! Mick's multicoloured wardrobe, spilling over into the whole of the unit which causes Bill to squeeze into snakeskin pants that will cause him "never to be able to produce another child" and Charlie donning what looks like a medieval jester's tunic. Mick and Keith look gloriously decadent in gypsy-chique make-up courtesy of Pierre Laroche, strutting around the stage in a couldn't-care-less fashion and sharing the mike with a defying air of nonchalance. The circus has come to town and the audience is in awe. Hundreds of drummers, *Fanfare for the Common Man*, the unfolding Lotus stage, the confetti-spewing serpent, Billy Preston (rest in peace) and Mick's bump 'n' grind routine, Ollie Brown's infectious added rhythms, Mick going up on a rope and riding an inflatable phallus. *Wild Horses*, *You Gotta Move*, *Starfucker*, *Outta Space*, *Angie*, *Heartbreaker*, *Fingerprint File*, *If You Can't Rock Me/Get Off Of My Cloud...* What a show! (OK, the playing was pretty sloppy, but who cares?).

The biggest show on earth was indeed the whole idea as the band famously announced the spectacle on a flatbed truck driving down 5th Avenue cranking out *Brown Sugar*. So just imagine to be invited along to document the Stones' most photogenic tour to date, or ever! And that happened to Christopher Simon Sykes. Young Christopher had already rubbed shoulders with Mick socially back in the 1960s and he was connected to the London in-crowd. When, at a function in '75 where he presented some of his photos, Christopher overheard that Mick was interested in an idea to document the new tour in a diary-style fashion, Christopher put his name forward through the Stones' financial adviser Prince Rupert Loewenstein.

Christopher was subsequently invited to Montauk, where the band was rehearsing for the tour, to meet Mick and show him his work. The band liked his snaps and Mick would come back to him. In true Mick fashion, poor Christopher was kept in the dark on a decision to the point that even Prince Rupert gave up all hope declaring that Mick had probably gone off the idea. One more late-night phone call proved to be crucial as this time not security but Mick himself picked up the receiver. Christopher let slip that Prince Rupert had already indicated that it would probably be a 'no' from the singer, to which Mick (typically?) promptly reacted the opposite saying he'd love to have Christopher on the tour. And so the book starts with an

extremely nervous Christopher joining the fresh tour a few shows in with an all-access pass in his pocket and a booked seat on the TOTA party.

The Genesis TOTA book provides us with that original intended diary-style document of the '75 tour. There was one earlier, in 1978, called *The Rolling Stones On Tour* which, I learn from this book, was very poorly distributed from Holland and didn't materialise as an international best seller. (I guess I'll guard my copy more closely with this knowledge.) But the original *On Tour* tome, I find, has one slightly up on the TOTA book and that is that it combines Christopher's pictures with those taken by a colleague snapper from Rolling Stone, Annie Leibovitz, adding a little more character to the collection, showcasing two photographic styles.

But, this is Christopher's document of the tour and it is a fantastic job done! There are plenty of unpublished pictures, a lovely personal diary and reprints of the famed TOTA daily newsletters that got slipped underneath each TOTA member's hotel door, giving a full update on the operation including timetables, places to go & things to see with the odd witty comment thrown in at times. As the pictures always tell the story, Christopher's collection covers the lot: on stage, off stage, rehearsing, hanging out backstage, at parties, on trips, in hotels, at dinner, meeting friends – you truly have unlimited access to the band through Christopher's pictures!

The TOTA book is simply the greatest testimony to a fantastic Stones tour and we should be grateful that parts of history like these are not disintegrating in some shoe box up in an attic somewhere and are presented in such a worthy manner. This luxury diary, with a foreword and signed by tour manager Pete Rudge is limited to 2,500 copies and comes in a blue TOTA bag. As you'd expect from Genesis books by now, this publication is presented on the highest quality paper with some charming touches such as glossy prints looking as if you've got an original print and reprinted tickets and magazine articles glued in for that extra 'real diary feel.

Christopher Simon Sykes spoke to *Shattered* magazine about the book. First off, we asked how he managed to land such a great assignment.

CSS: I was in the right place at the right time. I had done a diary for the Hesketh racing car team, and when I delivered the book to him, also there was the stepson of Prince Rupert Loewenstein. He, the stepson, immediately, said, 'We should do the Stones tour like this'. The Stones were at that time just preparing for the 1975 tour. Of course, that got me interested, and so he told me that he would suggest it to his stepfather. The next thing that happened was that I flew to the States to show my

work to the band. I had to pay for myself, although I was told I would be reimbursed if I got the job. Still it was very expensive and it was a risk. The band were rehearsing at Andy Warhol's house in Long Island. After I showed the photos to Mick, he said he would be in touch. I was given the phone number of the house.

I heard absolutely nothing, and every time I called I got hold of one of the security guys, who always said they would pass on the message to Mick. After a while of this, I re-approached Prince Rupert, who said that Mick couldn't make up his mind and that it would probably be better to forget the whole thing. That night I went to a party, and encouraged by a friend, I tried the house number just one more time. This time, it happened to be Mick who answered. When I told him that Prince Rupert had discouraged me, Mick said, 'No, you are on the tour'. I had to organise everything myself, visa, plane tickets and so on, and I eventually arrived about 10 days after the tour had started."

*What was it like being on the tour and how easy was it to do your work?*

CSS: I had total access to the band, and there were no rules or limitations. But I used my own judgement and sensitivity when and where to photograph the band, and so I wouldn't photograph some of the more controversial stuff. But there were no secrets: Ronnie and Keith were definitely the bad boys on the tour. Throughout the tour, I got on well with everyone, and I could move easily between the two camps (broadly speaking Mick and Charlie on one side, and Ronnie and Keith on the other, with Bill rather on the sidelines).

*How did you get on with Keith?*

CSS: I liked Keith a lot: he is the most straightforward man, very direct, even though, of course, he has his wild side. There were always parties in his room and on that tour, he very rarely slept. I occasionally went to his parties, but I knew also that I had to keep my wits about me, if I was to do a good job. I was quite nervous. One of the problems was that Annie Leibovitz was on the tour as the official photographer. I saw her, and invited her to play a part, and I made friends with her.

I attended about 30 shows in total, and I enjoyed it, broadly speaking. But people on the outside tend to think that tours are more glamorous than they are really are. There is a lot of hanging around. The first few weeks, everyone is up and excited, then there is a drop in the

middle of the tour, before the end comes in sight, when everyone gets excited again. But the band were always very professional and worked hard. It was good money, too. I earned US\$250 a week, plus a per diem of US\$25, which seemed like a fortune at the time.”

*Tell us about the book.*

I conceived the book as an album of family snapshots, with captions and written in a light and humorous way. I kept lots of mementoes from the tour, such as menus and hotel keys, and daily newsletters, which I knew would be useful. In fact, there was a book published soon after the tour, but that had been a nightmare. So I was keen to do the version I had conceived, and I worked in close collaboration with Genesis.

That is why the Genesis book is so good because it is much more how I conceived it in the first place. I am really thrilled with the way Genesis have done it and put it together.