

Nifty Fifty Party in the Park

The Rolling Stones are 50 and counting.....and with half a century under their belt decided to end their most recent series of gigs in London's verdant centre that is Hyde Park. A memorable site as it was not only their home turf, as Keith Richards gleefully points out, but of course also the location where their then young new guitarist Mick Taylor was rolled out as Brian Jones had rolled off to eternal eminence as a 27 year old Rock casualty back in '69.

That free concert was in front of 250,000 with Mick Jagger appearing in a white frock acting his most vulnerable, fast turning satanically majestic in character fresh off the set of *Performance*, setting the scene for the Stones' Mach II as they entered their '70s sojourn where copious costume changes and colourful stage antics soon became the norm. Roll on more than 40 years and here they are again on that same spot and here it is for you to pop into your very own DVD player: *The Rolling Stones Sweet Summer Sun – Hyde Park Live*.

As the Stones are still enjoyed best the bigger, I had the pleasure of viewing an abridged pre-screening in Notting Hill's Electric cinema courtesy of Eagle Rock and the Stones' publicity office. Luckily, the film has been shown in theatres across the world leading up to its DVD release. Mind you, if you are the proud owner of a monster flat screen TV (and who isn't these days?), you more or less will get the same effect. Even though they have slimmed down their shows these days somewhat, you're still in for a treat as the band roll out a really nice technicoloured spread on this occasion.

THE BUILD-UP...

Sweet Summer Sun thankfully doesn't just capture the Stones in concert as it starts off setting the scene beautifully with the band members elaborating on their past and present gigging status. Keith kicks off chuckling his way through the band's general attitude of delivering on stage before a bird's eye view swoops us into Glastonbury – a landmark gig for the band that also took place last Summer. "It's a fantastically English event," remarks Mick fondly looking back on festival etiquette. On a more biographical note Keith indicates that never having played Glastonbury would have left a big hole in the Stones' catalogue of concerts. "I'm glad we've filled that gap", he concludes. Fast forward to the capital whilst Ronnie voices over a tourist clip of London landmarks, union flags and red buses: "I think there's a feeling when we play in England and especially around London, it's like we're bringing it back home..." Cue the band live: "Ladies and gentlemen...would you welcome back to Hyde Park...The Rolling Stones!"

A flash of fireworks and Keith kicks into **Start Me Up** - as always a killer opener! Who would have thought that a shelved demo that started life as a reggae tune would become one of the band's biggest crowd pleasers of all time... Funnily enough, also the band's last number one chart topper at an amazing 31 years ago! Still, it hasn't lost any of its verve and gets the 100,000 horde instantly off their hinds as the party takes the

park in full swing. The editing is pretty conventional in the vein of Hal Ashby's *Let's Spend The Night Together* cutting predictably to a pose-striking Keith or grimacing Ronnie in time with the song's solid riff work. Having said that, you do get some amazing shots of Mick against sunset views from the back of the stage showing the wonderful Hyde Park skyline as the band rocks on with ***It's Only Rock 'N' Roll (But I Like It)***. Lots of power close-up shots of stylish young things clad in Stones-tongued T-shirts testifying to the song's title gives the current Stones live experience that trendy look we don't often see at aging bands' concerts. (Let's say the crowd scene at this year's Status Quo gig painted a totally different picture and they're a much younger band! But let's move back to the music. The first thing I notice is that the band sounds in fact a lot better than when I caught them live on telly from Glastonbury. No doubt the soundtrack on this occasion (also out on CD) has had a good polish and most probably some overdubs to make it all sound crystal clear. Altogether a nice package so far.

INTO THE WOODS....

Mick points out the tree-strewn stage quipping that it will become a permanent London tourist feature. If Stones-owned will they also charge £100-plus for a ticket, I wonder... I am being facetious now as, of course, I know that the band hasn't priced their concerts themselves for a long time but since promoters have bought the complete Stones tours (with the band members simply turning up on a fee) ticket prices have rocketed beyond belief. And that is the sole reason that I did not go and see the band on this 50th anniversary occasion. I have been lucky to have seen the Stones many times including the tiniest of venues but I started to draw the line after finding out that a decent ticket at the earlier O2 shows this year meant stumping up an unjustifiable amount of around the £250 mark and up, which is a shame. So instead I'll enjoy my much cheaper DVD now....and it looks like Mick hasn't forgotten his original following as he asks if there's anyone here who was around the first time back in 1969 with the cameras zooming in on the geriatric section of the audience.

Then it's time for some serious business as a defiant-looking Keith lays down the riff for ***Street Fighting Man***. We're on solid Stones territory now as the band blasts out a classic with seemingly little effort yet ultimate grandeur. The crowd loves it as the Stones roll out that old juggernaut talking about those heady London days with rebellion in the air. Heavy Rock makes place for a spot of brittle balladry with an excellent rendition of ***Ruby Tuesday***, proving to be a real gem once again. Then it's time for a newbie: ***Doom And Gloom***. A great classic riff and a shame it never really took off in the charts. By now you probably have guessed that this is indeed not the running order of the original gig the way fast and slow songs are performed on this disc. It's all pretty mixed up but somehow it seems to work as a 'best of' compilation of the two shows on the 6th and 13th of July.

HAVE CONCERTS, WILL TOUR....

A little resting point in the film has Mick reminiscing about Stones life and when he mentions that's it's the end of the tour I can't help but thinking how the 50th anniversary outing so *doesn't* have the feel of a tour in the way we had Steel Wheels,

Voodoo Lounge or Bridges To Babylon and it being rather a succession of shows. But that's maybe just me. So on with the show! **Honky Tonk Women** is next and Mick pops out wearing a white frock. "...Went to see what I had in my closet from 1969...to see if I can still fit into it!" he jokes and the crowd whoops with laughter. Overall, the choice of songs is rather rock-heavy with all the classics there: **Gimme Shelter**, **Jumpin' Jack Flash**, **Brown Sugar**, **You Can't Always Get What You Want** (complete with choir) and the compulsory **(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction** for the encore but the band do dip into a bit of country and disco on the way. Before ripping into **Happy**, Keith offers a genteel interlude with **You Got The Silver** featuring Ronnie on acoustic slide whilst **Miss You** is (as always) Mick's showcase bringing the swing back into the show. **Emotional Rescue** comes as a welcome bonus featurette, as do **Paint it, Black** and **Before They Make me Run**, and really is the only obscurity around as far as this package is concerned.

Midnight Rambler has Mick Taylor guesting, prompting yet another link to the original concert as Jagger introduces him pointing out that it was here that he played his very first gig with the band. The rendition of the song now, however, is sadly a mere shadow of what the band put on stage back in the day. Sounding way too heavy, gone are the fantastic little touches that Taylor used to play so magically to make this one of the most haunting tunes in the band's set list (listen for example to how the band played it in Brussels 1973). Also Mick Jagger's sexually charged on-stage flirtation with this dark tale of serial killing seems to have suffered over the years beyond repair. On the other hand, **Sympathy For The Devil** does deliver and is for me one of the highlights of this gig.

The filming and sound of this DVD are spectacular. We were told that, unusually, the band gave the filmmakers carte blanche to do whatever they wanted to do – and it shows. You get up close and personal, homing in on the glances, smiles and fingers of the musicians on stage. There even seems to be a camera in Keith's ashtray as he lights up and then puts his fag down before returning to the business in hand! It is genuinely exciting to track, through the camera, Keith striding to the front of the stage in that typical Keith walk prior to launching into Start Me Up, and also to see the joy on the faces of the choir in the intro to You Can't Always Get What you Want, as if they can't believe their luck that they are on stage with The Stones in front of 100,000 people.

So here it is: fun in the sun with the Rolling Stones 50 years down the line. Certainly the best live DVD they have done? Probably, but not the best concert.