

London, Twickenham, 20th August 2006

One of the features of the A Bigger Bang tour was the seating above the stage. Loyal Shattered reader Graham Kesby won a competition for seats to the first Twickenham concert, and tells it like it is.

The Chris Evans show was already on when I arrived home one Monday evening in August. He was going to give away five pairs of tickets every evening that week for each of the Stones UK shows. I always have a go at these 'phone in's' whenever the Stones tour, but I have never been lucky. He had already given away one pair of tickets for the opening show at Twickenham on the 20th August, another four pairs to go. The next question, what Stones song featured in the film 'Goodfellas', well I didn't have a clue but it was 'Gimme Shelter'. Another was from which famous blues artist did they get their name - Muddy Waters of course.

It was around this time I had a bit of luck, there were so many calls coming in that the system crashed, so on the next couple of questions we had to text in the answer. It was the last question - at what time in the song 'Live with me' does Mick Jagger take tea? I sent the answer in a nano second or maybe even quicker. Five minutes later my mobile rang. I don't usually get calls on my mobile in the evening when I am at home so I had to answer with the phrase 'Hello, this is my Rolling Phone, am I going to see the Stones?' It was one of the shows backroom guys, I had actually got through after years of trying. He told me my number would now go into the 'hat' for the draw.

Ten minutes later it rang again, 'Hello, this is my Rolling etc, etc. This time it was a lady who informed me that I was now in the 'short list'. It was now just a few minutes before the end of the show and Chris announced he would now call the last winner. He played a drum roll as he dialled the number and I stood in front of my radio looking at my wife thinking 'what are you doing, you've got no chance', then my phone rang. Hello, this is my Rolling etc, etc and I was talking to Chris Evans. I had won two tickets to see the Stones and we were going to be ON THE STAGE. This was in the tiered boxes that featured in the 'Bigger Bang' tour, positioned at an angle on either side of the stage.

The tickets finally arrived a couple of days before the gig and they were for Lower Box 3, Stage left.

On the 20th we made our way to Twickenham with friends who had tickets for the stands. We eventually found out we had to go to the Invincibles bar to receive instructions. It was exclusively for people with tickets for the stage and we were admitted by security. Once inside we were given wrist bands and a list of instructions for the do's and don'ts for backstage. It was very calm and quiet in the bar compared to the masses streaming around outside getting to their seats, buying merchandise and food etc.

After making ourselves comfortable at a table I went to the bar to get drinks and was informed that all drinks were included with the ticket, a free bar. I wish we had arrived an hour earlier!!

The time came for us to be escorted to our boxes, we were gathered in groups and led out. Obviously most people were now in their seats and the atmosphere was becoming electric as we were led through the tunnel and then through a gate to the backstage area. We could catch glimpses of the crowd through gaps in the staging and hear the roars, I can understand what Keith means when he says he can 'smell' the crowd and to be let out of the cage. We went up a long ramp and then up spiral stairs until we walked over a small gantry and there we were, right at the end of the box nearest the crowd, just above Keith's position. It was a great view of the stadium and fantastic to get a 'Stones eye view' of the audience.

We were escorted to our box just before showtime, and within minutes the chord for Jumping Jack Flash roared across the arena and there was Keith just below us. He was shortly followed by Mick who grabbed the mike and started singing. We were looking at them from behind but slightly to their left hand side and to see Mick that close was amazing, it was like 1965 all over again, the way he stood at the mike and tapping his leg in time with the music. Let's give this guy more credit, he is so professional and gives his all for this band.

What a great start, the sound was not as clear as I had hoped it would be but that often happens during the early numbers. Keith was moving about in full view, we were just about dead in line with Charlie on his left hand side and right above the horn section and Darryl Jones.

Unfortunately Charlie's head was obscured by a screen but we could see all his actions. Ronnie came into view quite often but we could not see the backing vocals or keyboards until Lisa or Bernard came to front of stage.

The overall atmosphere was tremendous, looking at all the crowd reactions and seeing the band this close, the first few numbers went by in a blur. The sound was better now and it was a bonus to see Ronnie doing the solos on Sway and sounding very good. Every now and again Mick, Keith and Ronnie came to give us all a special wave and of course we waved back. During the first few numbers as Mick returned to centrestage he pointed out wet patches from the earlier rain to the stage hands and they rushed out on their hands and knees wiping furiously.

Ruby Tuesday and Streets of Love were performed so well, the latter being a favourite of mine. Tumbling Dice led into Midnight Rambler and I love how they are playing this one on this tour, it sounds so fresh and new. The low point for me was 'Night Time is the Right Time', from where we were the sound was terrible, I was very disappointed as I have been a Ray Charles fan since the '60s. Some weeks later I acquired a cd of the gig and it sounded as if Mick was singing flat but, hey, one duff song out of 19, I can live with that.

Slipping Away was a real treat, I love the sentiment of this song and I thought Keith gave a beautiful rendition that night. After Before They Make me Run I realised I could see all of Charlie. His whole drum console had been moved forward and then slowly off they went, into the crowd, playing Miss You as they went. What a fantastic spectacle to see that 'B' stage sailing off into the arena. It didn't lessen the atmosphere from where we were.

Rough Justice was followed by a real surprise for me, Get off of my Cloud. I wish I had been out there in the crowd to leap about a little, it sounded wonderful. What a band, to be able to pick a song from about 40 years ago and make it sound brand new. Honky Tonk Women was their song for the return journey to the main stage. It was during the 'B' stage numbers that we were handed a copy of the set list and informed that if we needed to leave before the end of the concert, we would have to go before the band started Sympathy for the Devil. This was because the back stage area would become a danger area due to the imminent pyrotechnics. The only Stones gig I left early was

Knebworth and that was because I had started to suffer from hypothermia!!

On the set list I was given, You Can't Always Get What You Want was included between Brown Sugar and Satisfaction but they did not do it. So, it was the final home run towards the end. I wish they had included more newer numbers but I know they have to play the crowd pleasers. The noise from the fireworks was tremendous and we could feel the heat from the flame at the top of the tower. The streamers that shot out over the front of the stage were a marvellous spectacle.

All in all I think they are a very tight unit. Charlie is brilliant at the back, Ronnie seems nervous a lot of the time, he seems to look to Mick for encouragement after each solo. Keith doesn't seem to change; I think he genuinely enjoys each gig. Mick also seems tense, I wish he would relax a little more and also have a bit more to say. I have to say that if I'd had to pay for my ticket I would have been disappointed. I missed the general atmosphere of being among the crowd and we could not see the whole stage and lighting effects but it was great to be on the stage and so close to some of the band. I had a fantastic day.