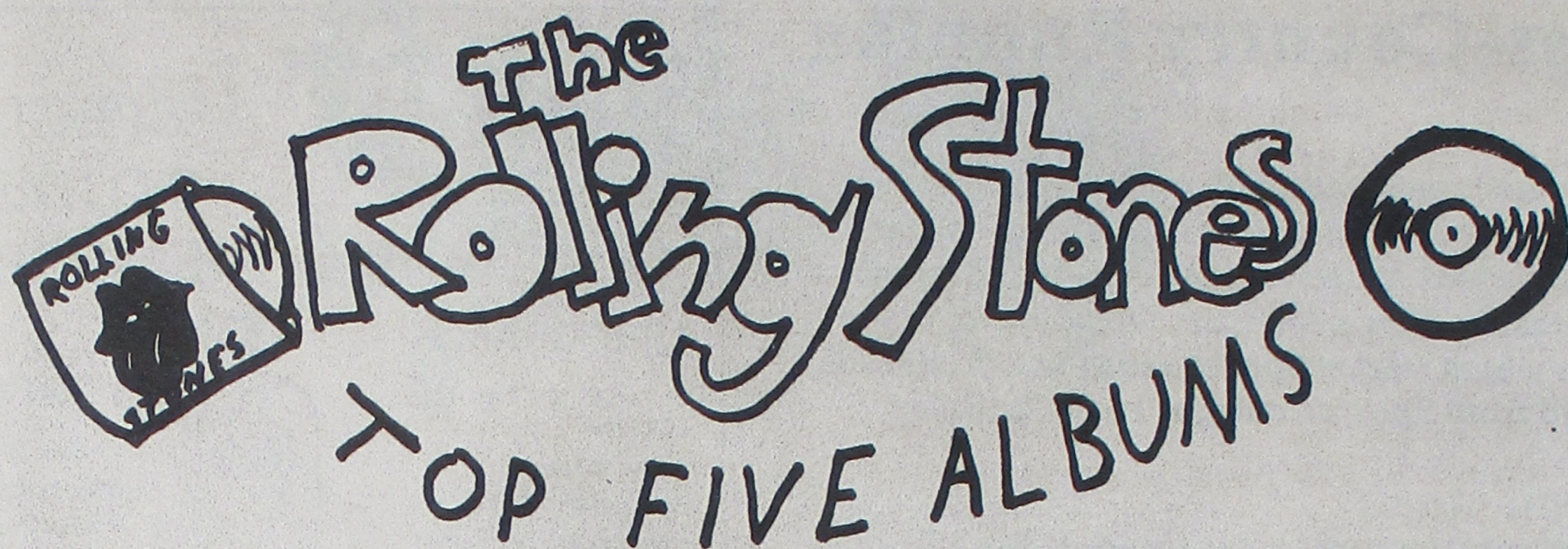


The Rolling Stones

TOP FIVE ALBUMS



Reviewing Guns n' Roses latest last week revived my interest in their most obvious comparison, The Rolling Stones. I hadn't listened to them in quite some time, and it was quite refreshing after the sledgehammer subtlety and lack of songwriting smarts of Guns n' Roses. Don't make too much of this comparison either, GnR aren't even in the same area code as the Stones were. Also, I make quite a few criticisms here, but their only relative to the incredibly high level of quality the Stones were at at the time. Anyway, I had the urge to write about a great band, rather than a frustratingly unrealized and bombastic one. So here's my list of the Rolling Stone's five best albums, listed in chronological order. My picks are as safe as milk, but I can't help that; the critics are right.

Aftermath- A great album but it does have flaws: "Going Home" isn't interesting enough to warrant an eleven minute running time, the misogyny is still present ("Stupid Girl" and "Under My Thumb"), "Lady Jane" is pompous, and there's some needless instrumental experimentation. Also, the band isn't as proficient as they'd later become, Jagger's voice isn't as convincing, and the band's playing isn't as unified. Still, the songwriting is at an early peak, highlighted by "Paint It Black" (I'm sick of that one). Somewhat overrated but still a very good album.

Beggars Banquet- An excellent album that many cite as their finest. Personally, I love this album, but I prefer the humanism that would emerge in their music. A rather threatening, sinister album in which the love songs sound like sick, warped jokes, and the rest is permeated with a dark side. Probably their most consistent album. The opener, "Sympathy for the Devil", is one of their greatest songs.

Let It Bleed- The transition piece between the London years and the Atlantic years. Contains some of the Stone's best music, most notably "Gimmie Shelter" and "You Can't Always Get What You Want". Not as consistent as Banquet, but I like the best here more than the best on Banquet. Some of the stuff here is just okay, and "Country Honk" is lame compared to the original "Honky Tonk Women" (another one that I've heard once too often). Nonetheless, a great album.

Sticky Fingers- My personal favorite probably because it's the first Stones' album I bought, and possibly because it's the band at their most restrained. Here they display a newfound mastery of the ballad ("Sway", "Wild Horses", and "Moonlight Mile" are gorgeous), some beautiful string arrangements, and the eloquent guitar of new member, Mick Taylor. By this time the songwriting had entered the stratosphere. There are weak spots: "You Gotta Move", like most of their straight blues turns, isn't terribly interesting, "Can't You Hear Me Knocking" is fantastic for the first couple of minutes but it ends a longwinded jam, and "Dead Flowers", like most of their countryish songs, isn't at the same level as the rest of the material. However, the rest of the album is as good as any rock n' roll out there. The band reaches a new level of proficiency; while not slick, the music attains a balance between proficiency and imperfect perfection. This is music filled with pain, compassion, and warmth. Pretty transcendent stuff.

Exile On Main Street- My nonsentimental favorite. The Stones now go for a rootsier, less grand sound. The ballads are more soul-based than the majestic balladry of Sticky, but are still just as powerful. The country experiments reach fruition, especially with "Sweet Virginia". The album also contains some