



When a Certain Chemical Reaction Happened: 'The Rolling Stones:

Crossfire Hurricane'

It's hard to imagine now, with rock 'n' roll long co-opted, that a band like the Rolling Stones were ever considered dangerous. They've been around for so long now that many fans came late to the party: after the drug busts, after the death of Brian Jones, after the last of the great records. We don't remember much beyond greatest hits records and stadium tours grossing hundreds of millions of dollars.

Crossfire Hurricane, a new documentary about the band, makes it a point to convey what a lightning rod the Stones were back in the day. Early in the film, we see footage of the band at one of its earliest gigs—while it was still little more than a blues cover band—trying to survive waves of fans rushing the stage. Young men and women run around the stage, literally tackling band members to the ground. The Stones flee the stage as Keith Richards, in voice-over, recalls that they didn't actually finish a show for more than two years. It's akin to all of those Beatlemania videos, in which the Fab Four come out to play but are drowned out by screams. Only with the Stones, the fans want a piece of the band, and in European countries outside of England, crowds of young men use the shows as excuses to get ramped up and have a go at the local police.

It's against these volatile beginnings that director Brett Morgan (*The Kid Stays in the Picture*) constructs his history of the band, in which they start off as innocent young men playing the roles of antiheroes to the Beatles, evolve into true bad boys and libertines in the wake of a prominent drug bust, and ultimately become the good-time party band that tours today. At a little less than two hours' running time, the film covers the band's history at a breakneck pace, slowing down only to examine the deaths of founding guitarist Brian Jones and the band's performance at Altamont, where a dark vibe culminated in Hells Angels killing a young man in the crowd.

That's a lot to cover; any one period in the Stones' history would be enough to fill its own documentary. According to Morgan, however, it was at the band's request that he construct an overview. They also stipulated that they not be filmed while Morgan interviewed them on the eve of their 50th Anniversary tour. The resulting film is a clever mixture of vintage performances, contemporary news pieces, the band's own home movies, and the modern-day band members' (even departed members Mick Taylor and Bill Wyman return) recollections in voice-over.

Long-time fans of The Rolling Stones won't learn much more than they already

knew. The band's history, especially the dark years, is extremely well-documented in books, films, and the band's own albums. Still, Morgan keeps the energy level up throughout the entire film. Starting with a performance from the band's 1972 tour, which many fans consider the band's best, *Crossfire Hurricane* proves just how electric the Stones were on stage. The young Jagger's stage moves are lithe, natural, and free of the admittedly impressive James Brown moves that marked his beginnings. Richards, of course, has long perfected his mix of calm menace.

From there, we jump back to the '60s and proceed in roughly chronological order. For those who haven't seen footage from these days—and *Crossfire Hurricane* has some jaw-dropping clips—Brian Jones will be a revelation. Alternately brooding and wild-eyed, he's as compelling as Jagger on stage. \Bonus features include *NME* Poll Winners concerts from 1964 and 1965, as well as two 1965 songs from Germany and a 1964 TV appearance. In that short span of 1964 to 1965, you can already see the band growing as they begin to find their own songwriting voice.

So *Crossfire Hurricane* is more for the casual or late-coming fan, although it's hard to imagine it not being a fun ride for even the most Stones-literate viewer. It's easy to anticipate some of the criticisms that the film will raise, though. With the Stones, who are notoriously guarded, you're always getting exactly what they want you to get. Still, their memories of Jones' firing and death, and of Altamont, are remarkably candid.

The film, like many of us, also gives short shrift to the band's later years. After spending most of its time on the Brian Jones and Mick Taylor years, Ron Wood's entry into the band is a blurry montage and we're given little more than a glittery glimpse of the *Some Girls*-era Stones.

That's the story Morgan elected to tell, though, and by the time Ron Wood brought his personality to the band, it could be said that the Stones had reached their last significant incarnation. By this time, they'd come through their years of adversity, and were reaping the rewards of being rock survivors. Granted, there's always the possibility that Jagger and Richards, in their 80s, will produce a stripped-down blues equivalent of Johnny Cash's *American* recordings, but for now, it's just as likely they'll ride their current nostalgic gravy train to its logical conclusion.

If the Stones story is pretty much set in well, stone, then *Crossfire Hurricane* is an energetic introduction to the band's history, and a fine gateway to the other more specific and detailed Stones documentaries out there.