

LEGENDS AT LARGE, RADICAL REISSUES & KILLER COMPILATIONS

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RESURRECTION SECTION

I remember having a discussion with a friend early last decade about one of the most pressing issues of our time: The Beatles or The Stones? Nowadays, there seems to be far less of a question in regards to who's superior—The Beatles are hands down the best. Ever. But, during the '90s and even into the Noughties, the Rolling Stones were still churning out material (albeit somewhat questionable at times) and touring regularly, which kept them in the public consciousness. While the band has never been as universally brilliant as its Liverpoolian counterparts, its swaggering sounds and uncanny visual style have been influential across the entire spectrum, from mainstream rock to punk, alternative, country and hard rock.



By the early '70s, most of the British bands that had dominated the prior decade had either dissolved or were well past their prime. The Beatles were gone, leaving The Who, The Kinks and The Stones as the foremost, relevant Anglo artists. Although all three would continue to evolve in different ways, the Stones were still the UK's reigning libertines, and its most pervasive export. Taking its style in a seedier, more decadent direction with a stark, unrefined quality, the band released its 10th album, *Exile On Main Street* in 1972. Prior to that, the band had already been breaking away from its more standard, R&B approach with a series of stellar records—*Their Satanic Majesties Request*, *Let It Bleed*, *Beggars Banquet* and *Sticky Fingers*. But *Exile* was a different beast altogether. The dark, textural double album was rife with a well-worn sense of confidence—and in many ways, was the first truly “lived-in” record of the band’s career. Ironically, there was nothing particularly new on the record, except for a bleak, world-weary authenticity that is the common thread running throughout the grooves, which feature an ample sampling of hard rock, country, gospel, blues and soul. The cause of the band’s personal angst was obvious—they were now seen as tax exiles in their beloved home of England and had to move to the South of France. On top of that, Keith Richards’ heroin habits had now reached epic proportions. Image-wise, Keith’s

fixation ultimately worked in the band’s favor. Thus, *Exile* may have been more innovative in its impact on pop culture than its actual sounds. The imagery of the shaggy, vagabond axe man—with a penchant for scarves, needles and spoons—that Richards conjured would soon become iconic, with bands such as the New York Dolls, Aerosmith, Guns N’ Roses, The Clash, Sex Pistols, The Black Crowes and Social Distortion lowering their guitars to the floor in the hopes of striking a similar alley-cat vibe.

But the music itself was some of the most compelling of the era. Numbers such as “Rocks Off,” “Tumbling Dice,” “Torn and Frayed” and “Happy” are sleazy and spirited, and serve to illuminate the band’s strengths and adaptability within a new era. On that note, along with Led Zepplin, the Stones were the quintessential ‘70s arena rockers, headlining massive tours and setting new standards for debauchery. Recently, *Exile On Main Street* has been reissued (Universal) in a deluxe package with a slew of bonus tracks and extras. For the ultra-diehards, the new vinyl version is the optimal way to go.

To further the cause, the DVD feature *Stones In Exile* (Eagle Rock) serves as a fine visual document behind the making of the masterpiece. In spite of its indie-release status, *Stones In Exile* is a full-fledged, feature film that includes in-depth interviews with all of the key players, including the Stones and their entourage. A montage of conversations, archival clips and live performances of the band at its decadent best accompanies most all of the tracks. There are also insights from the likes of Martin Scorsese, Jack White, and Sheryl Crow who further pontificate on the album’s merits. It’s interesting to note that *Exile* was not widely revered by critics or fans upon its initial release. But over time, followers have come around, and many cite it as the band’s apex. *Stones In Exile* does a fine job of furthering that case.

For questions, comments or something you’d like to see, hit me up at Retrohead77@yahoo.com.

