

CHARLIE WATTS 1941 to 2021

The rhythmic force behind the greatest rock and roll band in the world.

The Rolling Stones were a force of nature when they were in the studio during their artistic peak in the 60s and 70s. Their albums through the 60s produced masterpieces with *Out Of Our Heads* (1965 being their first self-penned), *Aftermath* (1966 which indicated song writing prowess) and culminating in *Beggars Banquet* and *Let It Bleed* (1968 and 1969 respectively – pure magnificence). Sure, we had several huge selling singles in between. A run of releases from 1965 to 1969 produced *Satisfaction*, *Get Off Of My Cloud*, *19th Nervous Breakdown*, *Paint It, Black*, *Mother's Little Helper*, *Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing In The Shadow?*, *Let's Spend The Night Together*, *We Love You, In Another Land*, *She's A Rainbow*, *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, *Street Fighting Man* and *Honky Tonk Women*.

Their incredible 70s album run continued with *Sticky Fingers*, *Exile On Main St.*, *Goats Head Soup*, *It's Only Rock n' Roll*, *Black and Blue* and *Some Girls*. The glue that provided their success was the rhythm unit of Charlie Watts and Bill Wyman. They dictated the back beat and gave the roll to the band's rock. According to Charlie, the Rolling Stones meant nothing to him – that was Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. They were the artistic front while the sparkles were the founders of the band Brian Jones and Ian Stewart not to mention Nicky Hopkins, Mick Taylor and Ron Wood. There are of course significant other contributors – Andrew Oldham, Jack Nitzsche, Glyn Johns, Dave Hassinger, Jimmy Miller, Bobby Keys, Billy Preston and Andy Johns – and yes, I am sure I have missed important others.

However, this only accounts for their studio work and their live work was where the band excelled. They were a tour de force when the band gelled and became as one from their single parts. I am lucky enough to have witnessed many performances from 1976 to 2018. Some have been great and others just good. At their weakest, the guitarists failed to concentrate, and their fingers failed to find the right chords. Even the greatest lead singer in the world could only entertain rather than mesmerise when he suffered with his voice. But one performer Charlie Watts never let you down. Depending, where you stood, you may struggle to see him, but you could always hear him pounding the song's rhythm and beat.

The jumbotron screen would reveal rock and roll's greatest drummer with a wry smile on his face. He was pleased to be at the rear watching his friends out the front taking the limelight. When the Stones were at their best live, they hypnotised and transfixed you. The song's rhythm became an internal force and emotion within you, even Mick's singing style was marching, charging. Much is made that Charlie came from a jazz background and that provided a swing unusual in a rock band. There is another element and that is Charlie and Keith worked together on the rhythm. One would follow the other and their eyes met instinctively to take the kick drum forward and then the back beat behind to rhythmic guitar stabs. There was room and space in between which is where their unique rhythmic tapestry created the greatest rock and roll band in the world.

Charlie Watts, you will be sadly missed. Deep condolences to his family and friends.