

Sexy, wild and dangerous, the Rolling Stones snarled and strutted their way onto the American scene in 1964 like delinquent cousins to the Beatles — they didn't want to hold your hand, they wanted something else.

Part of the British invasion of rock 'n' roll bands to follow Elvis, the Rolling Stones brought a new and threatening

element to the music. Your parents may have tolerated the Beatles, but they didn't like the Stones.

That was 30 years ago, but the Grand Old Men of Rock 'n' Roll showed the Show-Me State they've still got it when they satisfied a packed Faurot Field on Sept. 18. Indeed, their most recent world tour, the Voodoo Lounge campaign, is playing to rave reviews worldwide.

How have the Stones managed to

remain *au courant* all this time? Do they strike a unique chord in the American psyche?

Well, maybe, says Dr. Jim Curtis, chairman of German, Russian and Asian Studies, and author of *Rock Eras, Interpretations of Music and Society, 1954-1984*. But their success is no accident. Curtis says the Stones combine a unique blend of talent, technological savvy and marketing genius, the latter

Rolling through town

STORY BY SUE FRANCE
PHOTOS BY ROB HILL

Professor Jim Curtis was among 45,000 Rolling Stones fans who rocked beneath a full moon at Faurot Field Sept. 18. Author of a book about rock 'n' roll music, Curtis said the legendary band did not disappoint. "They're 'stone' professionals. They're too good, they've been at it too long, not to put on a good show."

"I don't think lyrics are that important," Mick Jagger, 51, told an interviewer in 1968. "I remember when I was very young I read an article by Fats Domino which really influenced me. He said, 'You should never sing the lyrics out very clearly.'"



courtesy of His Satanic Majesty, Mick Jagger.

"He's truly brilliant, a phenomenal businessman and performer," Curtis says of Jagger. "Even in the '60s, he was remarkably well-organized and mature — I'm not saying he's a nice guy, mind you, these aren't necessarily moral achievements we're talking about, but he is a genius."

Like the Beatles and many other British bands of the '60s, the Stones found much of their musical inspiration in American music. Unlike the Fab Four, whose music showed the influence of British folk music and popular entertainment, Curtis says, the Stones created themselves by re-working the music of the great American blues performers of the '20s, '30s and '40s, and rhythm and blues artists of the '50s.

With the intuitive understanding that Curtis calls common to great artists, Jagger recognized early on that this was something that would sell.

"He studied performers like Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, and he understood immediately how strong and exotic this kind of music would be to the English working class," Curtis says. Jagger and Keith Richards took the pure blues sound and gave it a twist, speeding up the tempo and turning up the volume to appeal to their decidedly different audience. Jagger even borrowed stage mannerisms from the black blues masters when creating his own, inimitable on-stage persona.

"Whatever Mick does takes on an ironic, taunting quality that's worked extremely well for him, and for the Stones, for a very long time," Curtis says.

Though he is reluctant to use words that suggest value judgments or smack of elitism in his discussion of music, Curtis does not hesitate to call Jagger and Company "the world's greatest rock 'n' roll band."

"Just look at the numbers. In America, money is an index of popularity. Money is an index of talent. No other group has ever played so much rock 'n' roll so well for so long."

The Stones also cash in on their mastery of the medium that best communicates their message.

"Great performers become great because their talents fit the technologies of the time," Curtis says. "We saw it with Elvis, who came along just as electricity cleared the stage" of the big-band accoutrements that supported performers like Sinatra and Crosby. "The performer was isolated. Elvis compensated for the emptiness of the stage with his intense gyrations." Curtis offers Michael Jackson and MTV as another happy example of the entertainer married to the right technology.

In the case of the Stones, the rhythm and blues sound was ripe for expression with high-powered electrical instruments in the hands of the right individuals, Curtis says.

The Stones also increased their longevity by avoiding over identification with political or social movements of the time. You didn't see Mick Jagger or Keith Richards at sit ins, they didn't sing about peace and love, they didn't demonstrate publicly against the Vietnam War.

No Stones?

The Rolling Stones didn't appear in a list of the 50 most-requested CDs and artists for the week of Sept. 1, compiled by KCOU, Mizou's student-owned-and-operated rock radio station. The top 10 are:

- *If I Were a Carpenter*
(various artists)
- *Magnapop*
- *Sebadoh*
- *Northerns/Bunnygrunt 7"*
- *Natural Born Killers soundtrack*
- *Stereo Lab*
- *Jade*
- *Bad Religion*
- *Beatnik Filmmasters*
- *Small 23*

Jagger, loses control over his audience," Curtis writes. "Great trouper that he is, he works the crowd by using the rhetoric of flower power and says, 'Be cool, brothers and sisters.'" The trouble was, Curtis continues, "his audience at Altamont lacked the shared faith, the shared experience of oppression that makes it real when blacks address each other as brother and sister...the consensus even great performers need wasn't there, so he couldn't stop the violence."

Altamont was tragic, and it may symbolize the end of an era, but the Stones roll on. Undiminished by age or past events, they continue to understand and exploit rock music's appeal at its most personal level. Mick Jagger described that appeal in a 1980 interview; it is included in Curtis's book:

"Rock 'n' roll isn't protest and never was. It's not political. The whole rebellion in rock 'n' roll is about not being able to make noise at night and not being able to play that rock 'n' roll so loud and boogie woogie and not being able to use the car and all that."

Remember what that's like? Still feel it sometimes? If so, give a listen to the Stones. They haven't forgotten either. ☐

The one political and social event that did involve them directly, albeit against their will, heralded the end of the spirit of the '60s, Curtis says. That event was the Stones concert at Altamont, Calif., on Dec. 9, 1969.

"If the '60s began with the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show, they ended with the Stones at Altamont," Curtis says in his book. At that concert, a young black man in the audience was beaten to death by a member of the Hell's Angels. The motorcycle gang was providing event security. The death was documented in the 1970 film, *Gimme Shelter*.

"The most gripping moment comes when Lucifer himself, Mick

Communicate

What was the best musical performance you attended while a student at MU?

Mail to: Missouri Alumnus 407 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, Mo. 65211

Fax to: [314] 882-7290

E-mail to: alumnus@muccmail.missouri.edu