

S & ENTERTAINMENT

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Japanese tour, the crew of nearly 300 was geared up to get the 51 truckfuls of equipment into four 747s waiting at the airport.

The empty seats must have stung as the Stones hit the stage, but they never let up during the two-hour show. Ronnie's solos were spot on, and Keith played a beautiful "The Worst," ending the song alone in a spotlight with his grizzled, heartfelt voice echoing through the arena. "Sweet Virginia" was an acoustic highlight, and on "Jumpin' Jack Flash" they let it all go in a blistering, rock-the-house finale.

The Rolling Stones are even bigger heroes for me now by refusing to be cynical in the face of that disappointingly small crowd. They were professionals in the best sense of the word, acutely aware that people were paying good money and that expectations were high. While the Stones are now playing to oceans of boisterous fans in Australia, they rocked small-market Fukuoka with a power that was life-affirming and inspiring, putting on a show in which fans could celebrate the best parts of the band's mythos, and showing that this group of legendary fiftysomethings is still more than capable of blowing the competition away.



SATISFACTION — From left, Richards, Wood, Jagger and Watts.