

Stones are fiftysomething else

By Eric M. Olson
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I was 9 the first time I saw the **Rolling Stones**. I escaped the house by saying I was going to sleep at a friend's. That was true enough. What I forgot to mention was the evening's entertainment, the Exile on Main Street tour of '72. I was enough of a fan to know the Stones were one of the roughest bands in rock, and I shook with fear as we made our way to the arena that night. Once inside, I was surrounded by tough giants, all with incredibly long hair, leather jackets, rock and tie-dyed shirts, most smoking cigarettes, taking swigs from pints or filling the air with marijuana. Danger was definitely in the air. I was often bumped as we made our way to our seats and almost started crying. Everything suddenly changed, however, when the lights went down, the Stones hit the stage and I was swept away by an awesome rock and roll machine half an arena away.

The atmosphere couldn't have been more different on March 22 and 23 as the Rolling Stones brought their Voodoo Lounge tour to Fukuoka Dome. I was now a veteran of a few hundred shows, and

the notoriously nondemonstrative (though very appreciative) Fukuoka crowd waited in polite silence for the concert to start. No one dared violate the no-smoking rule or stage-rush past the sea of skinny security guards in white raincoats (put those same guards at a Pantera concert in the States and you'd have to spatula them off the floor).

Jagger, Richards, Watts and Wood hit the stage running with "Not Fade Away," "Tumbling Dice" and "You Got Me Rocking." Jagger's moves and vocals were his most spontaneous in decades, and the band was incredibly tight from nine months of touring. Kyushu *karaoke* veterans helped power an awesome "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" and sax man **Bobby Keys** wailed the best solo of the night during a superb "Miss You." Down the homestretch, "Street Fighting Man" was the most stirring performance, followed closely by "Brown Sugar" and the encore "Jumpin' Jack Flash." The crowd loved every minute, but Japanese fans definitely have to learn to **MAKE SOME NOISE** (Elvis Costello once led an audience here through a chorus of "I'm dead ... I'm dead"). What's always great about the Stones live is how their 4-minute songs get

stretched into all-pistons-firing epics, with Richards and Wood free to improv and Jagger his usual hyper-rubbery, master-showman self.

What followed was blind luck. A few hours after the show, a friend and I headed for the Stones' hotel. My friend spotted Bobby Keys, immediately chatted him up and before we knew it we were heading for a private party at a bar in Nakasu. I poked my head into the karaoke room and sure enough there was guitarist Ron Wood, the man Jagger called "The Karaoke Kid." Wood and backup singers **Lisa Fischer** and **Bernard Fowler** (among others) spent the next four hours bleeding the selection of English songs dry. Bobby and Ron were both great, full of warmth and no pretension. It was easy to see the affection they had for each other, both on stage and as they sat together at the bar's piano. A cool night.

Keys helped score me some good tickets and backstage passes for the following night, although I was a little hesitant after hearing the Dome was only half sold out.

Backstage, the atmosphere was friendly and very well organized, although there was concern with being unable to sell out two shows. As this was the last show of the

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.