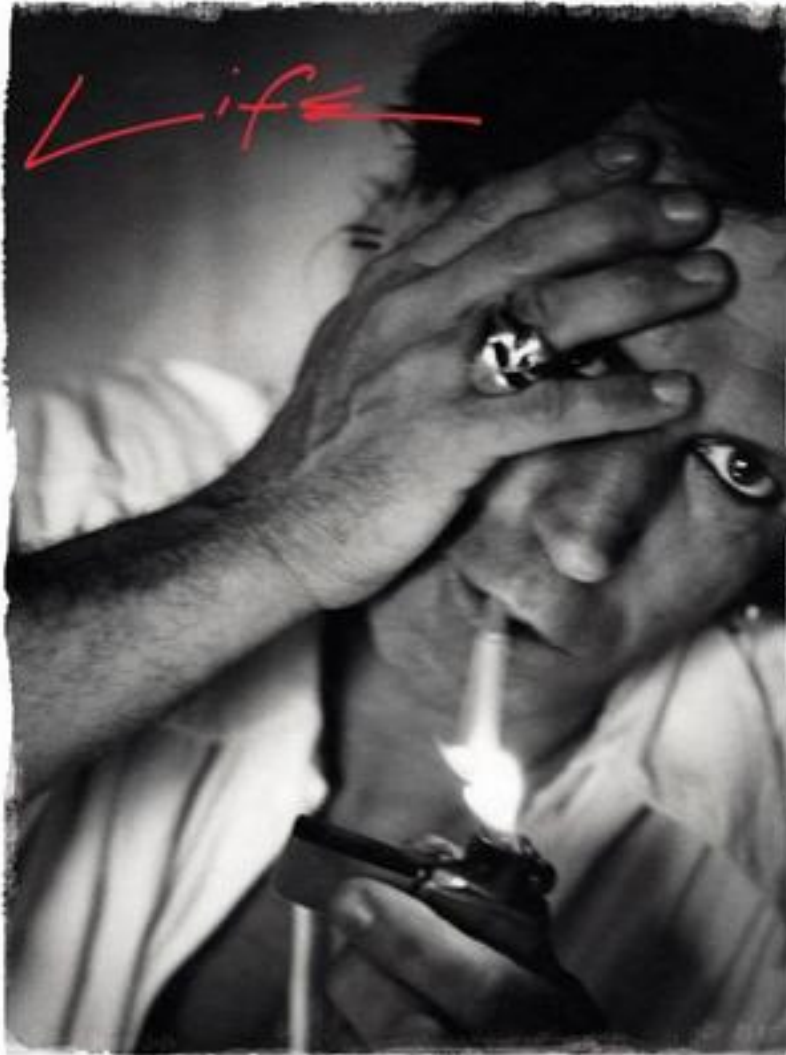


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KEITH RICHARDS

By:
Keith Richards

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What people Say:

Petra Eggs

A GR friend (who wishes to remain anonymous) has sent me a really good story about Keith's son Marlon, whom my friend knew well. I've posted it in the comments, msg. 67.

7 star book!

One of the best books I've read this year. Keith Richards was a clever kid, a talented artist, a choirboy who sang for the Queen and became an outstanding musician in one of the world's best bands. What is most on display in this book is his tremendous interest in music and musicians, not in rock, bands, mone

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What is also interesting is his drug use. We never hear the ins and outs of being a tremendously successful heroin junkie. No, the spin is always on those poor street people who will steal their own mother's wedding ring for the next fix as they are quite beyond work. Richards enjoys his drugs a lot and tells us exactly what it feels like to be high on them and how it helped his work. His main supplier is his best friend and partner in crime, the very flamboyant Freddie Sessler, a holocaust survivor and (handily) owner of pharmacies so he could supply medical grade cocaine and heroin, who travelled along with the Stones. There were other dealers to ensure that when the band arrived at their tour date, the drugs would be ready and waiting, always a difficult time for a junkie.

The antics of the UK and especially US law enforcement officers to catch, entrap, imprison and get the Stones banned are hilarious as are the stories of Richards escaping them (most of the time). This is where money and being a big name helps! The story about Richards and Bobby Keys being got off a rap they had no defence against by the owner of Dole Pineapples is classic.

Ana

Probably the best audiobook I've ever listened to. Actually this is the first and only audiobook I've listened to. It's narrated by Johnny Depp. A Keith Richards biography narrated by Johnny Depp. How cool is that!

Mr Keef is no mystery to me. Victor Bockris's celebrated Keith Richards biography and The Rolling Stones : In The Beginning photograph coll

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Mr Keef is no mystery to me. Victor Bockris's celebrated Keith Richards biography and The Rolling Stones : In The Beginning photograph collection by Bent Rej have a special place on my parent's bookshelf.

So, the age old question... who is better, The Beatles or The Rolling Stones? The answer is, of course,

To say Keith Richards has lived an interesting life would be an understatement. He puts the R in rock star.

I can't think of anyone cooler than Keith Richards. Can you?

I had to write this down. It's... oh just read it.

Steve

I started listening to the Rolling Stones back in the early 1970s. "Hot Rocks" (an early "greatest hits collection" and still one of the best by any band), "Sticky Fingers," "Exile on Main Street," "It's Only Rock and Roll," etc. In terms of the group and its history, I caught them in their second wave, the one where they had morphed into the "World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band." I saw the band once, during their "Tour of the Americas" tour (the one where Ron Wood joined the band). I hung with

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Well, on the long Memorial Day weekend I saw that the book was out in paperback, and thus no longer the size of a phone book. Richards' kohl rimmed eye (beyond the skull ring and lit cigarette) stared back at me. I had too much time invested with this group. I had to read it. I'm glad I did. I'm not a big fan of rock bios, but Richards (along with his writer pal, James Fox), has crafted the best book of its kind that I have ever read. The only other rock memoir that I would put on the same shelf would be Dylan's "Chronicles." But that effort is still uncompleted, and due to Dylan's own cryptic approach, less revealing. Richards, on the other hand, will tell you everything, from drugs, music, and sex, to how to cook "bargers."

Does he wander a bit? Sure, especially toward the end. But part of what makes this book so interesting is that it does capture Richards' voice. As a reader, you feel as if you're listening to a long, fascinating conversation. It can disgust you at times, but also surprise you. Outside of a silly near drug bust beginning in Arkansas (which for me underscored just how lucky Richards has been over the years), the book is told in a chronological way. The early chapters, focusing on Richards' childhood, hooked me right away. These were very well done, painting a post World War II picture of Britain that seemed more a cultural history than a rocker's bio. Richards' exposure to music came early, in large part due to the bohemian lifestyle of one set of grandparents. One surprise was Richards singing in a school choir and being pretty good at it, at least until his voice broke.

Then come the Stones years. Mick (an old childhood friend), Brian, Charlie Watts, Bill Wyman, and others, parade by on a quickly accelerating train to fame. One thing that struck me was how hard these guys worked at their music. Even then, Richards was surprised when fame came. As he tells it, "something happened." One moment they were the opening act for the Everly Brothers, the next moment the screams were for them. He sensed the musical shift coming, but when it happened it was still a surprise. No doubt that other group down the road, the Beatles, noticed it even sooner.

And it's the Beatles, and their success, that make the Stones. The Stones, up to a certain point, were a cover band doing old blues numbers, and loving it. But their manager at the time, Andrew Lloyd Oldham, knew they had to do more, become original, in order to survive. At this point Richards

and Jagger were shoved into a room and told to write a song. The chemistry was instant, probably already there due to a long established friendship that included a love of the same music. The songs, the hits, started coming, and at an amazing pace. The band was now a Jagger & Richards band.

I may have enjoyed this part of the book the best, since Richards's telling seems fresh. In addition, Richards takes occasional musical pauses, explaining how he learned to play this or that, and how it worked in X or Y song. I'm not a musician, so I don't really know what he's talking about, but taking a step back, you can see the man's love of music on display.

And then there are the drugs and the women. For Richards the perfect storm is Anita Pallenberg. Clearly he loved her and to some extent, still loves her (Richards is devoted to his women). But together they are also two addicts in love with heroin. Their relationship would produce three children. Two have grown up to be (against all odds) fairly normal, and one would die, sadly, from crib death (or neglect, it gets kind of fuzzy here). Pallenberg, a free (insane?) spirit, would film a movie with Mick, called "Performance." There's a brief affair between the two (rumored to be captured on film) that Keith finds out about later. In the book, Richards downplays this, saying he knew what Anita was like, but then childishly points out how he "had" Marianne Faithful (Jagger's girlfriend), and then jumped out the window as Mick arrived. It's a story that meant to wound. One personal trait that strikes you about Richards as you read on is that Richards is big on Loyalty. For those who want to find a fracture point with the Stones, I suggest that this, Jagger's dalliance with Pallenberg, is it. I take Richards on his word regarding Anita, but it's Jagger, his childhood friend, and what he did, that started the downward spiral between the two bandmates.

I could go on and on about this book. It's a long book, a long history, and Richards tells it all. But the heart of the book is the relationship between Jagger and Richards. Throughout the book there is withering fire from Richards directed at Jagger. It's not a black or white criticism however, since Richards often praises Jagger for his performances, his work ethic, his friendship. It's an honest attempt to be honest. Less honest is Richards' treatment of his drug abuse problem. He pats himself on the back for beating smack, but does it in such a way that suggests he was always in control. This is junkie-speak. At one point he says, jaw droppingly, "I never really overdid it." Even if Richards did beat his addiction, he merely substituted it for another: booze.

In the late 70s and 80s, as Richards sunk more and more into drugs, Jagger began to exert more control of the band. He also started to look for an exit "via his own solo career. This is probably fracture point No. 2. Richards's loyalty to the idea of the band, the Rolling Stones, is total (whatever that now means). Jagger's attempt to start up his own career around the time "Dirty Work" came out, nearly ended the band. However, Jagger's failure to get traction in his own career (his solo albums sucked), would lead to his return to the Stones. Interestingly, Richards's solo efforts gathered some critical praise.

F.R.

Keith Richards's autobiography starts really well and holds that momentum for a long time; although when it reaches the period covering the Eighties it does fall somewhat into score settling, and after that becomes somewhat bland and without spark. As such you have to hand it to this book, it really does mirror The Rolling Stones' career.

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Ghost writer James Fox does a fantastic job of catching his master's voice. No doubt Keef was sat down in front of a microphone and told to talk about his life into tape after tape after tape, but from there Fox has managed to create a seamless narrative whilst rendering the subject's personality. It really does seem as if Keith Richards is talking to you, sharing all his best anecdotes in his avuncular growl "all the time throwing around such terms as "cat", "babe", "bitch" and so on. (I imagine the audiobook of this would be a real treat.) There are some odd points: for example, the book never addresses the fact that for the first fifteen years of his career Keith Richards was known as Keith Richard. I always assumed that Andrew Loog Oldman (their then manager) tipping his cap to the far softer British rock'n'roll icon Cliff Richard. But there is no real tackling of The Peter Pan of Pop, apart from Keith seeming to take glee in Cliff's run of British hits ending when he decided to record a Jagger/Richards track.

Part of the problem with this book losing steam is that I think Richards appreciates that after "Start Me Up", the Stones never produced another great song. As such those later sessions do not have the attention to detail that he gives to "Exile on Main Street" or "Let It Bleed". He does however give a spirited defence against charges of the band selling out with their mega-tours, just saying that they want to play music and this is the best way to do it. And after spending six hundred pages with the man, it's hard to begrudge him that love of performing. Particularly as the majority of people who buy this book will certainly consider buying a ticket the next time the Stones hit the road.

Velvetink

Growing up in Dartford for Keith "was somewhere to get out of. After WWII it was pungent with horse manure & desperation and he never forgot the story that he was born in an air raid shelter. It wasn't London. It wasn't hip or cool - it was the backside of the wrong side of the tracks. But when his father Gus gave him an old wooden guitar and showed him a few chords and licks, London loomed closer. Especially after he could play "Malaguena" and managed to escape National Service "that grea

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This autobiography is really massive, too many decades to cover in a review & many have already so I will only mention a few things that stood out for me. I've not read any other Stones biographies before although know they are out there & which document many of the tensions and dramas the band has had over the decades.

Keith met Jagger in 1961. They would hang out in seedy record stores waiting for the next consignment of Blues and Jazz records to arrive from Chicago, listen to them and try to work out how to play them & learn how to write songs like that. For Richards, the Blues is the core and basis of his Life. He talks eloquently about the blues. I was enthralled. I had a totally different idea of Keith, certainly not one so articulate (even if the book is co-written by James Fox).

Keith knows how to talk about music "he's not unable to express what music means to him or how he arrived at a certain tune and I know many who can't. He exists not in the light blues spectrum but that very dank swamp kind of blues. He loves John Lee Hooker, Muddy and Lee & Berry.

He talks about many early English bands that influenced him such as the likes of Alexis Korner's Blues Band, who had Cyril Davis playing blues harp & his later R&B "All Stars". Jamming at the Earling Club (a traditional jazz club) is where he met Brian Jones. Rather than focus on all the drug fecked times Keith had (and the book contains a testament of his usage), it was the many small things he mentioned that impressed me and made me smile, like his memories of his first amp that he re-wired from his mother's radio and his description of his De Armond pickup that always needed soldering during gigs. Things like that made me realise how easy it is these days to learn to play a song "with the internet for lyrics and chords and software programs like "Garage Band" where you don't even have to own an instrument and everyone thinks they can become a rock star. He recounts the Stones first record deal with Decca and the first recording

studio at Olympic Studios with the then state of the art equipment (walls with egg cartons and a fairly basic Grundig tape recorder). Wannabee's should take note. It takes perseverance, a lot of love and dedication & invention. Keith heard and played with a lot of awesome jazz musicians at the Earling and T-Bone Walker (of Chuck Berry's 50's band) was one of those. T-Bone was one of the first to use the double string thing and Keith found it worked for him and became something of a signature to his playing. You can't play some of the Stones' music without that double guitar string. It just does not sound right.

A lot has been said about Keith's addictions and his relationship with Anita Pallenberg before this (and he's fairly candid about most of it in "Life".) The journalist Bill Wyman (not the Stones Bill Wyman)

has his bitch about "Life" with a few decidedly cutting remarks regarding the death of Keith's 3rd child (cot death) and blaming Keith for it "which I felt beyond the pale when at the time Keith was on tour with the Stones and the death occurred under Pallenberg's care.

Anita was perhaps more an addict than Keith and while I cannot say what her demons were, I don't think that Keith used drugs in the same way "he didn't have any of the same kind of mental tortures & childhood regrets that fuel the usual addict. He does go into the reasons he used and for the most part were either for endurance or to sleep. Like a tool which I believe. And he was honest about his efforts at rehab. He doesn't gloss over any of it. He admits getting clean was hell and he did it at home with just the help of his manager Jane Rose "the two of them locked in a room till he dried out. Warning more than once to kids not to do drugs.

I felt he had a phenomenal memory until I realised co-writer James Fox must have also done a lot of research and hung around with Keith just talking for hours to unearth so much material. But also Keith kept journals all throughout his life something I find admirable considering his years of addiction. In all I found him a really likable and open guy. For all the so-called dissent and rifts between Keith & Mick and Brian, Keith always gives them their due praises all through the book. He loves Mick, and loves playing with the Stones after all these years. That's saying something.