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*Through The Past, Darkly
(Big Hits Vol. 2)*

The Rolling Stones

Mick Jagger, vocals
Keith Richard, guitar
Brian Jones, guitar
Bill Wyman, bass
Charlie Watts, drums
Produced and arranged by
The Rolling Stones,
Andrew Loog Oldham and
Jimmy Miller



I usually don't like "greatest hits" albums because they seem a bit of a shuck. It looks like laziness on the part of the artist and greed on the part of the record company not to put out new material. You've usually heard those songs too often as singles to want to play them at home. And as singles, often their brazen commerciality puts them several simplistic notches below most album cuts.

The Stones have been very guilty of this laziness with records like "Flowers". Their newest release, "Through the Past Darkly (Big Hits Vol. 2)", is a collection of ten old hits plus present hit "Honky Tonk Women". This album transcends the "greatest hits" syndrome and shapes up an identity of its own as a new whole. It seems a true retrospective piece.

Among other things, the Stones are thinking here of Brian Jones. The octagonal double jacket has a photo of the group pressing noses, lips and hands at you against a glass. On the back, the glass has been shattered and Jones' face is obscured. On the inside covers they all lie like wheel spokes, feet center and Jones is the only one with his eyes open -- looking elfishly up at you. The dedication across from him reads: "Brian Jones (1943-1969) When this you see, remember me/ and bear me in your mind/ Let all the world say what they may,/ speak of me as you find." "Paint It Black" seems grotesquely appropriate as the opener.

The album covers three years of Rolling Stones' music and it illustrates why they've had such phenomenal staying power in the transient rock scene. Although they are sloppy, shabby technicians, their material has depth and growth and they are highly innovative stylists. In that they express the simple and intricate feeling of being alive, they epitomize rock and roll.

Although the eleven songs here are not programmed chronologically, three major periods emerge from the collection. The first is produced by Andrew Loog Oldham, the second has Rolling Stones production and the third group was done by Jimmy Miller (Traffic and Blind Faith's producer).

Oldham's early cuts here, "Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby?", "Mother's Little Helper" and "Paint It Black" belong to the Phil Spector school of big sweeping

More Stones

sounds, tons of echo and muddled tracks. This production applies well to the Stones at the time -- Oldham had to jumble to cover the instrumental flaws. "Dandelion" and "Ruby Tuesday" are a real jump in artistic coherence. The cuts begin to be clearer, longer, better executed, and there is more development of theme.

When the Stones produced themselves, they gained artyness. They graduated into psychedelic music but they lost the sex and violence of Oldham days. "2,000 Light Years from Home" and "She's a Rainbow" represent that period here. The pluses are the ornate production replacing Oldham's mass of sound so that

everything is clearly heard and the overwhelming expansion.

The best of the two previous periods are fused where Jimmy Miller appears with "Street Fighting Man", "Jumping Jack Flash" and "Honky Tonk Women". Apparently Miller came in and did an organization job on them because his work with them has more direction and drive than anything they've done. These cuts have both vitality and refinement, and often paradoxical mixture.

Even if you're familiar with all the separate songs on this record, you'll probably be surprised at the scope and talent and just plain enjoyment in the Rolling Stones.

Johanna Schier