

SEEING THE LIGHT

Encouraged by visionary manager Andrew Loog Oldham, The Glimmer Twins' writing partnership sparked a bright future for the Stones. Praise be, says **STEVE O'BRIEN**



Should a Rolling Stones biopic ever get made, one of its dilemmas will be how to dramatise that first songwriting jam between Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. If its makers go with Keith's version of events, it'll depict Andrew Loog Oldham, their manager at the time, literally locking the pair in Richards' kitchen and telling them, "Don't come out without a song!" After which, Mick and Keef emerge victorious with *As Time Goes By* (later *As Tears Go By*).

Jagger's recollection of that night, however, is more prosaic. "I think Andrew may have said something along the lines of, 'I should lock you in a room until you've written a song,' and in that way he did mentally lock us in a room, but he didn't literally lock us in," Mick claimed in the book *According To The Rolling Stones*.

Whichever room the Stones' singer and guitarist found themselves in, history was made that night in early 1964. But it had been kind of inevitable. Two years into the band's career, it was becoming obvious to Oldham that the well of old blues numbers would at some point run dry, and that, to prolong their run of hits, the group would have to start coming up with some of their own. As to why he picked Mick and Keith and not, say, Mick and Brian or Brian and Keith, Oldham explained: "I worked on the assumption that if Mick could write postcards to Chrissie Shrimpton and Keith could play a guitar, then they could write songs." It was, as history records, a masterstroke.

Keith has always maintained that, if it hadn't been for Oldham, it would never have occurred to him and Mick to start penning their own material. Certainly at the time, their lack of interest in songwriting was such that their manager had to point to the group's great chart rivals in order to motivate them. "Look at the other boys," he'd say, referring to John Lennon and Paul McCartney. "They're writing their own songs."

By the time The Beatles released their debut single, in 1962, Lennon and McCartney were almost veteran songwriters (Too Bad About Sorrows dates from 1957). But Jagger and Richards' creative partnership didn't grow organically, and their early compositions were tailored to whatever artist their manager was trying to break that month. "I want a song with brick walls all around it, high windows and no sex," Oldham is alleged to have told them that night.

As Keith opined in his autobiography, *Life*, their first song was "a terrible piece of tripe". Except that tripe, *As Tears Go By*, would go on to become a Top 10 smash for Oldham's

hot young protégé Marianne Faithfull. More songs followed, made to measure for other artists on Oldham's payroll. "We wrote loads of airy-fairy silly love songs for chicks and stuff that didn't take off," Keith recalled. "Mick and I refused to put this crap we were writing with the Stones. We'd have been laughed out of the goddamn room."

Though few of those first songs showcase Mick and Keith's writing at its peak, the crafting of these formula-heavy singles for Oldham provided, in Jagger's words, "something of an apprenticeship".

GROWING PAINS

The Rolling Stones would, of course, put out their own version of *As Tears Go By*, in 1966. But the first Jagger-Richards (now Jagger-Richards, since Keith reverted to using his original name) tune to be waxed by the Stones was *Tell Me (You're Coming Back)*, the only self-composed number on their eponymous debut album, released in 1964. Listening to it now, it doesn't really fit; amid a plethora of

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covers of songs by the likes of Willie Dixon, Rufus Thomas and Jimmy Reed, it's more Merseybeat than Chicago blues.

Though *Tell Me* was issued in various territories as a single, it wasn't given a standalone release in the UK. The first Jagger-Richards composition to be put out as a Stones 45 in Britain was February 1965's *The Last Time*. Keith admits, in *According To The Rolling Stones*, that he and Mick found writing the catchy pop tunes for Andrew Oldham relatively easy, "but it was very difficult to write one for the Stones".

Though *The Last Time* is adapted from a gospel song recorded by The Staple Singers in 1954, "it gave us something to build on", explained Mick, "that we could decently present for the band to play". Unlike *Tell Me*, *The Last Time* was something its writers were proud of. It took guts to present a Jagger-Richards original to the rest of the band, and only when they believed they had something watertight did they put it to the Stones. "It gave us a level of confidence," Richards recalled of their creative breakthrough with *The Last Time*, "a pathway of how to do it. And once we had done that we were in the game. There was no mercy, because then we had to come up with the next one."

It helped that *The Last Time* topped the hit parade. Even the Stones' Lennon-McCartney-penned release, *I Wanna Be Your Man*, from 1963, had stalled at No 12, while *Not Fade Away* (a Buddy Holly cover) had peaked at No 3. Jagger and Richards were now not only genuine hitmakers, but had become so with a song they'd written and believed in. The only trouble now was how to top it.

Like Paul McCartney and Yesterday, the track that launched The Rolling Stones to global stardom came to Keith Richards in a dream. Waking up with a riff rattling around his head, he picked up an acoustic guitar and quickly pressed *Record* on a cassette player he had nearby. "Satisfaction," the guitarist wrote in his book, *Life*, "was a typical collaboration between Mick and me at the time. I would say on a general scale, I would come up with the song and the basic idea, and Mick would do all the hard work of filling it in and making it interesting."

Released in June 1965, (*I Can't Get No*) *Satisfaction* hit No 1 across the globe. It would be a game-changer for the Stones and for Mick and Keith as writers. Freed from being composers for hire for mostly undistinguished artists on Oldham's roster, they were now legitimate songsmiths, on a level pegging with their friends and rivals Lennon and McCartney.

Like their Beatles brothers, however, the Jagger-Richards credit

could be misleading. Though all the Fabs' earliest originals had been joint ventures, John and Paul were, by this point, writing more and more individually, though no one listening at home would have known, as their songs were officially attributed to Lennon-McCartney. Likewise, there are many Stones numbers credited to Jagger-Richards which are in fact solo compositions. *Sympathy For The Devil* and *Brown Sugar*, for instance, are Jagger-only tracks, while *Ruby Tuesday* and *Happy* are Richards' babies.

When asked by *Rolling Stone's* Jann Wenner why he and Keith kept the joint songwriting credit, whoever was behind the track, Mick replied: "We just agreed to do that, and that seemed the easiest way to do it. I think in the end it all balances out."

THE FLOODGATES OPEN

Satisfaction's success led to more Jagger-Richards masterworks – *Get Off Of My Cloud*, 19th *Nervous Breakdown*, their version of *As Tears Go By*... But the first Rolling Stones album to jettison covers altogether was 1966's *Aftermath*. The release of (in the UK) their fourth LP, then, was the moment the five-piece completed their metamorphosis from covers-reliant bluesmen to bona fide rock gods.

But it was also the point at which Brian Jones was truly dethroned within the Stones. According to Keith, in *Life*, Brian had "lost his status and his interest", due to Mick and Keith being the band's writers. "Having to come to the studio," Richards wrote, "and learn to play a song Mick and I had written would bring him down. It was like Brian's open wound." Keith felt sorry for the band's founder and attempted to co-write with him,



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only "no sparks flew when I was sitting around with Brian".

As the Jagger-Richards alliance was taking off, the Lennon-McCartney coupling was beginning to dissolve. The Fabs' most fractured record, *The Beatles* (aka "The White Album"), came out just a few weeks before the Stones' *Beggars Banquet*, an album for which Mick and Keith penned all but one of

(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction: "A game-changer for the Stones and for Mick and Keith as writers."

the tracks (*Prodigal Son* was a rare, by this point, cover).

Though the partnership has had its peaks and valleys over the decades, the Jagger-Richards brand has survived for over 60 years, with 11 of the 12 songs on their latest LP, *Hackney Diamonds*, credited to The Glimmer Twins. And it appears that, six decades on from the *As Tears Go By* all-nighter, their writing process remains largely the same.

Reflecting on composing the Stones' 24th album, Mick told *MusicRadar*: "I like to write songs on my own. I don't live on the same continent as Keith; he

doesn't do Zoom so I can't write on Zoom with him. But still when we got together in Jamaica and started jamming these things around, it's the same as we always have been."

Charlie Watts once claimed that, while Andrew Oldham was the person who pushed Mick and Keith into writing songs, "that doesn't mean to say that one day they wouldn't have decided to do it themselves".

As it was, it's thanks to the foresight of the Stones' manager (who'd admittedly also grown resentful at having to pay copyright fees and royalties to the composers the Stones covered) that we have the Jagger-Richards union, a partnership every bit as totemic in popular culture as Lennon-McCartney.

"We've had fun arguments, writing songs," Richards reflected in 1989, when asked to explain the creative dynamic between him and his long-time friend. "I would say, 'I think this should be an instrumental,' and meanwhile, he'd written an opera... To me, writing songs is like making love: You need two to write a song."

FACTORY BOYS

How Jagger-Richards cranked out tunes to order, laughing all the way to the bank

Though Andrew Oldham, for the most part, gave Mick and Keith's early songs to up-and-coming artists, a few of their numbers were recorded by singers with a profile as high as the Stones'. 1964's *That Girl Belongs To Yesterday* was a Top 10 hit for Gene Pitney, while *So Much In Love* (first waxed by The Mighty Avengers) was, in 1966, covered by The Herd, a group that included Peter Frampton in their ranks.

They also penned a single for Adrienne Posta, an actor best known for her roles in such movies as *To Sir*, *With Love* and *Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush*. A limp Phil Spector pastiche, *Shang A Doo Lang* wasn't a hit.

"It was fun," Jagger said in *According To The Rolling Stones*, reflecting on his time co-writing pop tunes for other singers, "and Andrew made it very light-hearted. Because none of these artists were very good. They were all kids that Andrew was trying to pick up. We all knew they were useless. He'd say, 'Come on, write one for this or that bloke,' and you knew it wasn't important and your career didn't depend on it. It was all done for extra money on the side, and very much tongue-in-cheek."



Shang A Doo Lang: not a hit for Adrienne Posta.