

ENGINEER/PRODUCER

ANDY JOHNS TALKS ABOUT OTHERS

and the 'STONES'

album 'IT'S ONLY ROCK 'N ROLL'

by
PAUL LAURENCE

Whatever else you might say about the Rolling Stones, you can't say they haven't tried. I mean, how many groups can even stay together long enough to go through two blonde guitarists, or lose that many lawsuits to Allen Klein? How many other groups would throw a free concert and have *that* happen? Who else has ever had a performance reviewed as "excellent rock & roll, but not decisive"?

And you've got to remember that it hasn't always been this easy for the Rolling Stones. In "the early days," they were so poor that they had to steal eggs at parties and returnable bottles wherever they could to augment a lifestyle that rarely rose above the level of mere subsistence. Home for them was no sanctuary either, as the boys waged a losing battle against their tiny Chelsea flat's singular effort to self-biodegrade, ultimately being driven out of all but the end room by a "Sorcerer's Apprentice"-like army of dripping pipes, rust, mold, peeling paint, and falling plaster. Much later on, when the success of their initial records would bring them to America for their first U.S. tour, they would finish second to a performing horse.

Life for Andy Johns has been a strange sort of experience as well. Born just 25 years ago in Epsom, Surrey (after which the fine table salt is named), he has somehow pulled things together to become one of England's top mixers, perhaps rivalled only by his older and also-legendary brother Glyn. His credits, certainly, are impeccable: Traffic, Free, Jethro Tull, Led Zeppelin, Blind Faith, Joe Cocker, Leon Russell, and Stephen Stills are but some.

As for the new, "Rock 'n Roll" is first and foremost another new recorded/mixed sound for the Stones, in and of itself a tradition². Instrumentally, it features a fuller-than-usual range of effects to create some new and novel textures. Stylistically (and no doubt to a degree the result of these new sounds), it represents the band's initial foray into Gamble & Huff-dom with some Philadelphia-styled jazzy soul.

All in all, the group was pleased. "A step forward," said Keith Richard. The critics (in their own cryptic way) were pleased. "Decadent . . . desperate . . . violent . . . intriguing," said one. Even the fans — those

The Rolling Stones seem to have this thing for Andy too. Although he's very modest about his abilities, they've seen fit to have him be head engineer on their last three albums, recorded in France, Jamaica, and West Germany, respectively.

"It's Only Rock 'n Roll" is, in a manner of speaking, the most recent Rolling Stones album¹. Like most of their records, it is a mixture of the old and the new. The familiar elements, to be sure, are there in Mick Jagger's urgent vocals, Keith Richard's driving suspended-fourth chording, and Mick Taylor's mercurial guitar flights, supported as usual by Bill Wyman's self-effacing bass and Charlie Watts' eminently tasteful drumming. Joining them on keyboards, as is now the tradition, are three of the era's most respected and distinctive players in Nicky Hopkins, Billy Preston, and the inimitable Ian Stewart. Thus assembled, they explore many familiar Stones highways and byways: the acoustic, country-tinged ballad, the slow gospel number, the Jagger/Richard duet, and, of course, plenty of that chunky and spirited sort of music for which they are so well known.

vast legions of otherwise-normal Americans who just can't seem to get the intro of "Honky Tonk Women" out of their heads — even they were pleased. Released in October of 1974, "It's Only Rock 'n Roll" spent 20 weeks on "Billboard"'s album chart, occupying the No. 1 position for but a week before its sudden and decisive ouster at the hands of Elton John's greatest hits.

Sound-wise, it is the cleanest and most "studio" Rolling Stones album in a long time. This is due to a number of factors, among them being a higher percentage of overdubbed tracks (partially a result of Mick Taylor's being absent for half the album's tunes, forcing Richard to make up the difference), less rumble, and generally tighter miking. Tonally, "Rock 'n Roll" has a very rich and midrange-y sound, fairly unadulterated by leakage (= highs) again because of more overdubbing and tighter miking. The album's sparser instrumentation also contributes to its overall accessibility, there being appreciably fewer tracks per song than is customary, only one tune having "outside" backing vocalists and none with brass or strings. "It's Only Rock 'n Roll" is a much "drier" record than might be expected, having far fewer tape delays than previous albums.

With regard to individual tracks, "Rock 'n Roll"'s key aspects are as follows: the vocals (and this is pretty radical for these guys) are quite clean, of moderate level, and up-front, with not nearly as many per song as in the past. Many of them have a somewhat "breath-y" quality, a result of less limiting/compression than is normal for them. The drums are also "airier" than ever before, due to a greater proportion of overhead to close miking. The kick drum (long a focal point of the Rolling Stones' sound) is here less prominent, having noticeably less limiting/compression as well.

PAUL LAURENCE: Was it always your intent to be an engineer?

ANDY JOHNS: Yeah. I started hanging out at studios when I was 12 or something when Glyn was working at IBC. It was what I always wanted to do.

My first gig was at Olympic. I remember the first session I ever seconded — it was with "FAMILY" and it was their first session too. Jimmy Miller was producing, John Gilbert was there, Eddie Kramer was engineering . . . God, it was weird. That project took a long time to do, but it really came out all right. I think I worked at Olympic for about eight or nine months, and then they threw me out 'cause I . . .

continued overleaf —

1. Two other albums have been released since, but neither is comprised of current, previously-unreleased material. "Metamorphosis" (Abkco ANA 1) is a collection of old demos and outtakes, while "Made In The Shade" (Rolling Stones CDC 79102) is a "greatest hits" collection spanning 1971-1974.

2. The group has not released an album that sound-wise could be confused with any of its predecessors since "Let It Bleed" in 1969, which fairly closely resembled the previous year's "Beggars Banquet."



"... when I am producing sessions, I don't feel that I am doing anything different than when I am just engineering. I say the same things and do the same things, but at the end of the album they call me the Producer, as well as, or instead of, the Engineer. It really doesn't make much difference."

was always turning up late! Then I went to work at a place named Morgan Studios. I seconded there for about two months or so, and the only other engineer there left for Canada and so I started doing all the sessions. We did some amazing albums that first year. I'd only just started, and I'm working with all these incredible people! Jack Bruce, Traffic, Blind Faith, McCartney used to come in...

PAUL LAURENCE: Did Glyn teach you many of his techniques?

ANDY JOHNS: No, not really. When I was working with Glyn, I wasn't that terribly interested in engineering. I didn't even bother to watch what he was doing, and I never really thought to ask very much.

Certainly, he does have fairly definite ideas, especially about things like drums and vocals. Miking is his trip, really. He just seems to get them in the right places. It's very easy to get a sound on something — it really is — but when you stick all those sounds together, will they all work with each other? Glyn's always do. He's a brilliant balance engineer as well. The

first bunch of years he was working, there wasn't much multitrack stuff done. It was mostly straight to mono, so you had to get it together then and there and get a really great balance. If you get an incredibly good balance on anything, the sounds don't have to be individually that spectacular.

PL: Is it true that your brother was one of the first English engineers to close-mike?

AJ: Something like that. Glyn started in like 1959, and in those days, everyone was still into recording with distant mikes. The mikes would always be like four or five feet away from everything. I think rock & roll was pretty much done that way too. If you listen to those old rock & roll records, there's not really much separation — you can hear the drums leaking all around the room. I think that Glyn was one of the first people to get into screening everything off and close-miking it for a tighter sound, and to go for a definite "sqund" on an instrument.

PL: Do you have any specific beliefs about what an engineer should be or do?

AJ: I suppose if I do, it would be in the way that you work with the people, more than any specific ideas about how something should sound or something. I just try to lay it out so that the session goes smoothly and nobody gets hung up. You're sort of sequencing everyone properly, and trying to keep them fairly cooled out. Like if the drummer wants to do a drum overdub or something, and everyone else goes "Oh no, man, come on!" you try to tell the guy in a way he'll understand, or let him do it for one time and have him come in and see for himself that it doesn't work.

PL: Now you're pretty much talking about "producing," aren't you?

AJ: The two things are so closely related. The idea of "producer" and "producing" is very strange anyway. When I am producing sessions, I don't feel I'm doing anything different than when I'm just engineering. I say the same thing and do the same thing, but at the end of the album they call me the producer as well as or instead of the engineer. It really doesn't make much difference.

PL: Have you ever had any engineers or producers whom you thought were excellent, and wanted to be something like? Who's your idea of a great engineer?

AJ: I'm not really too into that. Sometimes, I do listen to records and go "Blimey," and I want to give up.

PL: What sort of record makes you feel this way?

AJ: Just something that has a fantastic sound to it. What first turned me on to wanting to get good sounds and things was that "Buffalo Springfield Again" album, which I thought was fantastic! Botnick did most of that, didn't he? I've met him once or twice. Hendrix's first album was another record that had great sound. I don't have any specific favorite engineers, just individual albums with good sound.

PL: When did you first work with the Stones?

AJ: I seconded a lot of their sessions on "Satanic Majesties." I used to see Mick around quite a bit at that time because he was producing a few people for Andrew Oldham — Chris Farlow, Pat Arnold — and he was always kind of floating in and out of Olympic. I also knew Bill fairly well.

The first thing I ever really did for them would have been "Little Quennie." I was doing a session at Olympic for George Harrison, and Mick turns up with these tapes and says "Ah, great. Can you mix this business?" I ended up by doing one or two mixes for the "Ya-Ya's" album, also the sequencing and the audience overdubs and all that.

It was really scary working with them to start with. They were very much into being right on top of you, but I somehow managed to get away from that after not too long. It's just that they didn't trust you very much to start with — they didn't trust anyone very much to start with. As soon as they found out you were okay, they would leave you alone completely.

I should tell you about the first actual session I ever did with them. It was at Stargroves with the truck, and this was the first time it had ever been used. They had been working on "Bitch" all night, and I'd been working on the sound. We'd reached this point, and so I called everybody in for a playback. Everyone who was at the house — all the hangers-on, groupies, and everyone — crammed into the truck to have a listen. After a bit, Mick turns around and goes "What the hell do you think that's supposed to be, Andrew? I could do better on my bloody cassette!" This is in front of all these people! I thought "Well, I can't let him get away with that," and I said "No, man, I think it sounds quite good meself. Sounds perfectly all right to me. Perhaps we should talk about it outside." He said "There's nothing to talk about — you just get it together." I played it for him the next day and he thought it was fine.

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PL: What sorts of things do they need or want in an engineer?

AJ: Really someone's who's pretty together and remembers what's happened, because they forget a lot of the time. Certainly they expect you to get a good sound, which is not too hard with them as they'll sometimes run a track through for four or five hours. They're very good to work with, really. They'll do pretty much anything for you, as far as the sound goes. I remember that when we were doing "Exile," they were all over the place and they couldn't see each other and the cans were terrible and I was moving them all around. This one particular time, I'd been hustling Keith and made him change his guitar and his amp like three times, because we just weren't getting a good sound. He was over in one corner, screened, with an amp in the other room. He probably couldn't see the thing or hear it for all I knew!

PL: What sorts of challenges do they present for the engineer?

AJ: Well, it's a good idea to keep the tape rolling with them. You know, if you go off to the kitchen to get something to eat, the two Micks might start playing something or Keith's doing something with Charlie, and then you finish breakfast and Keith will say "Did you get that thing . . . when I was in there with Charlie and my amp blew up, remember?" and you'll know because Stew went out into the room to fix a broken amp, so you can just about place it.

PL: Do you have any standard areas of disagreement with them, like over leakage, or how a kick drum should sound?

AJ: No, not really. They don't usually approach it like that. As long as you're getting a good sound, they don't question it. If they don't like it and they start questioning you, then you might start disagreeing about things.

I think Mick and I used to argue a lot about the volume on playbacks, that's all. He was always telling me to turn it down. I do actually play things a bit loud.

PL: Has it impaired your hearing? I think I hear more highs on one side.

AJ: Your two ears are bound to be different. I mean, your two hands are different, each side of your face is different. You know, if you put a pair of cans on and you balance it up so it's centered and then you take the cans off and turn them around, the center will be off!

PL: The Stones have always had such a great bass-and-drums sound. I'd be interested to know how much Bill and Charlie participate in the way they sound.

AJ: The only thing that Bill usually says about his sound is that he wants it "bigger" and to come through more, which is often difficult to arrange with him. I don't know how it happens, but some days you can make his amp in a very normal manner, but for some reason, all you can hear is like 200 cycles and under. He'll have all this bottom end, with just a bit of top in there somewhere, but kind of separate from it. It sounds as if he's got everything on full bass, but you go outside and look at the amp, and the bass will be about halfway up, the top's well up, he's using the treble pickup, and he's playing with a pick! It's not the instrument, because he's used all sorts of basses. When you finally do get his sound — that "Bill Wyman Sound" — it's really fantastic!

PL: What would be a song where you really got his sound? "Jigsaw Puzzle?" "Street Fighting Man?"

AJ: Yes, "Jigsaw Puzzle" — it's a good bass sound. "Street Fighting Man" was Keith — he did the bass on that one. That was a great guitar sound too. I always used to think that was an electric guitar, 'cause it really does sound like an electric guitar, you know? Every session I ever did, I was always trying to get that sound somehow. I was sitting talking to Keith one day in France, and I asked him what he did there with the electric guitar on "Street Fighting Man," and he said "That's not an electric, man — it's a bloody acoustic, you cloth-eared idiot!" I had spent like four or five years trying to get that sound from an electric guitar!

PL: What sorts of things would Charlie say about his sound?

AJ: Well, when you're doing takes, Charlie's usually more concerned about what he's playing than how it sounds. If it's a really good sound, he might notice it, but generally, no. If it's not a very good sound, he might have noticed, but probably wouldn't say anything unless you quiz him about it. Sometimes, when the others have left the room, he'll come over and practically whisper "I don't know, that thing Bill's doing on the choruses is a bit . . . it's that, isn't it? But I'm not going to say anything. They won't listen to me anyway."

PL: What were the circumstances surrounding the making of the "It's Only Rock 'n Roll" album?

AJ: It was recorded right after their European tour. It was much more together than the last two albums we've done. There wasn't nearly as much time spent running things through, and everyone would even turn up at the studio at about the same time.

Mick Taylor had a problem with his sinuses, and so he was mostly overdubs. We were there for about a month, working like five or six days a week. I think we ended up with five basics that were used. They were good sessions — I enjoyed them. We didn't have any vast problems with the sound, although I must admit that that first day I was really wired 'cause I could not get a drum sound any way at all! Usually when it's that bad, you don't end up getting anything very good, but it came out all right, really.

PL: How come you weren't involved in all the sessions?

AJ: Well, after the first sessions in Munich, I started an album with Jack Bruce here in Los Angeles. I thought I was only going to be here for two or three weeks, but it ended up by taking two months! I couldn't just leave Jack here and go back and start doing them, so they used Keith Harwood for the remaining tracks.

PL: Why was Musicland closed?

AJ: Well, before the tour, we were all in Amsterdam for 12 days of rehearsals and recording, but the room they were using was so diabolical that I just wasn't bothering to turn up most of the time. Then Mick and I had to go off and make some change on "Starfucker" — censored or something — and so we had occasion to check out a number of studios. We were saying how nice it would be to record in Europe instead of traipsing off to Jamaica or something like that. Obviously, they couldn't record in England because they'd used up all their time there, and so we started looking around. Apparently Stew had gone to see Musicland and

liked it, and so Mick phoned me up and said "Would you please go and have a look at the studio?" to see if I would like it as well. I couldn't go because I was ill, and so the first time I saw it was when I walked in for the first session.

PL: What did they do that first session?

AJ: Probably nothing. Probably just jammed around. I remember they were really pissed at me because I hadn't been to see it.

PL: Did Musicland have a particular "sound" that you liked?

AJ: I really liked the monitors, in fact, I think we all did. They were Cadac monitors. They had — can you believe this? — two 18-inch speakers in each cabinet driven by a 100-watt amp for the bottom end, a vast great midrange horn which worked off 60 watts, and then four cardboard tweeters which worked off 40 or 50 watts or something. The cabinets were taller than I am! The board was a Helios. The room was fairly large but very dead. Sandy Brown did the room, I think.

PL: How about the other engineers?

AJ: Well, Tapani is a Finnish guy who works with the Stones' truck. Mac was the guy who sort of got the place together and also the chief engineer there. He was a great bloke, and he did all the sessions with me.

PL: Were you purposely going for a cleaner sound on this album?

AJ: Well, Mick and I used to sit down and talk about what the last album had been like and usually be fairly down on it. We don't generally get too specific, just whether it had been good or not and what we could try this time. For "It's Only Rock 'n Roll," I was trying to get a cleaner sound, and so I just came down on all the distortion that I heard. It was also a much cleaner studio.

PL: What would an average night's recording for this album have been like?

AJ: Well first of all, we would all arrive together, as we were all staying at the same hotel. Keith would start running through whatever he fancied at the time, and maybe Mick and I'd be listening to the tracks from the previous night, and then we'd get around to cutting some tracks. That's all they do for the first month or so — record tracks. They don't really have formal "overdub" sessions as much as it reaches the stage where you have to start finishing things off. If the overdub sessions get boring, they'll just cut another track.

(at this point, the "blindfold test" was initiated and "It's Only Rock 'n Roll" was put on)

IF YOU CAN'T ROCK ME

AJ: I'll tell you what we're doing here. I was getting into a thing of using two amps on Keith — one out in the studio, and then one running from the extension speaker jack into maybe a vocal booth, with the mike a bit further away. We kept them separate in the mix, and so it's like two guitars. We did that on "Ain't Too Proud to Beg" as well.

I don't know who mixed this, but they really buggered it up. It's all squashed — there's no "air" around it. It had a fantastic sound to begin with.

. . . continued on page 39

ANDY JOHNS . . .

continued from page 34

PL: You limit the guitars a lot, don't you?

AJ: I used to. I used to compress things a lot of the time. I don't very much anymore.

AIN'T TOO PROUD TO BEG

AJ: This is Billy on clavinet, overdubbed. It's going through a wah-wah, very compressed, with lots of midrange. I think we took it mike and direct.

PL: Are there any original vocals on this album?

AJ: I don't think so. Mick doesn't very often sing much for the cans because they go on for so long doing a track that after four or five hours, he's getting a bit bored with it, and so he'll maybe just do the ends of verses and the ends of choruses so they know where they are.

PL: Is Mick an easy vocalist to record?

AJ: Oh yes, he's very easy. We generally record him pretty flat — maybe just a notch of top or something, or a notch of bass out.

PL: How many takes does he normally go through before he gets a vocal to his liking?

AJ: Not very many. Usually he'll run through it a few times, do three or four takes, and then maybe drop in a verse. If it's not happening, he'll just stop and say "Let's do it another night."

IT'S ONLY ROCK 'N ROLL

AJ: I wasn't in on this one. It was done over at Ron Wood's studio when they were doing his album. This isn't the Stones rhythm section — it's Kenny Jones on drums and Willy Weeks on bass.

PL: What would you have done differently had you been involved?

AJ: I don't know, the rhythm section just doesn't mix on this. I certainly would have mixed it differently. The drum sound's a bit funny on this as well, don't you think?

PL: Is that fuzz guitar coming straight into the board?

AJ: Sounds more like the amp breaking up to me. Maybe a little compression in there too.

TILL THE NEXT GOODBYE

AJ: That's Keith on the first acoustic — which is stereo, incidentally — and bottleneck. That might even be Mick Taylor on the other acoustic guitar.

PL: This is a pretty nowhere drum sound.

AJ: Well like I said, I don't know what happened when they mixed the album, I really don't. They did some very strange things.

PL: What is your attitude toward the Stones' fabled "original vocal leakage," like here or "Angie"?

AJ: It doesn't really bother me, but that's just

with them. With another band — supposing for instance "Hide Your Love" — it just wouldn't work. It would just sound awful. We could have said "Well let's re-do the piano that the vocal's leaking onto," and probably could have done it and gotten away with it, but the whole feel would have gone. With the Stones, that's the whole thing — the feeling that they're creating. If you listen to any of their records, that's what it is. Sometimes Keith has tried to re-do his original rhythm part, and it's never come off with the same feel as the basic track.

TIME WAITS FOR NO ONE

AJ: This doesn't ring a bell at all. I don't think I did this one.

PL: How would you guess these guitars are being modified?

AJ: Well there's some tremelo on this one guitar, and I would say that the solo is just regular recording with straight old delay echo on it.

PL: Would you say that you did less limiting on this album than you usually do?

AJ: Probably less, yes. It's because the tracks are less frantic and you don't have to compress, say, the vocals so much to come through.

LUXURY

AJ: I didn't do this one. Strange sound, isn't it?

DANCE LITTLE SISTER

AJ: I didn't do this one either. I hate this one.

PL: I can't believe that Mick Taylor would have approved his track here for the master take.

AJ: By that time, he probably didn't care. I don't blame him either. It's a shitty old track.

PL: Would you say that you used more overhead on the drums on this record than you have in past years?

AJ: Possibly. I used a Sennheiser shotgun mike very, very high over the snare that sounded real good. I had about ten mikes set up for the drums, but was only using four or five at once. I'd keep using different combinations to see what sounded best.

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO BE MY FRIEND

AJ: Now this one I did. The basic track was just piano, bass, drums, and guitar. They like to do the keyboard with the basic track if they can. Sounds like Mick Taylor's guitar is going through a synthesizer or an octave divider or something like that. Keith is playing the Leslie guitar. I remember that for the solo — which was overdubbed — we ran Mick Taylor's guitar through a Leslie as well. The bass is Bill.

PL: How about the backing vocalists?

AJ: I don't know, I didn't do them. They were overdubbed somewhere.

SHORT AND CURLIES

AG: I did this, unfortunately.

They first started muckin' around with it in Jamaica, but it was actually cut at Olympic. We don't have to listen to this one, do we?

FINGERPRINT FILE

AJ: This main rhythm guitar here is Jagger. It's going through a Leslie and mixed stereo.

PL: Isn't there some phasing in there too?

AJ: A Leslie will do that when there's a lot of distortion on it. A Leslie speaker is very similar

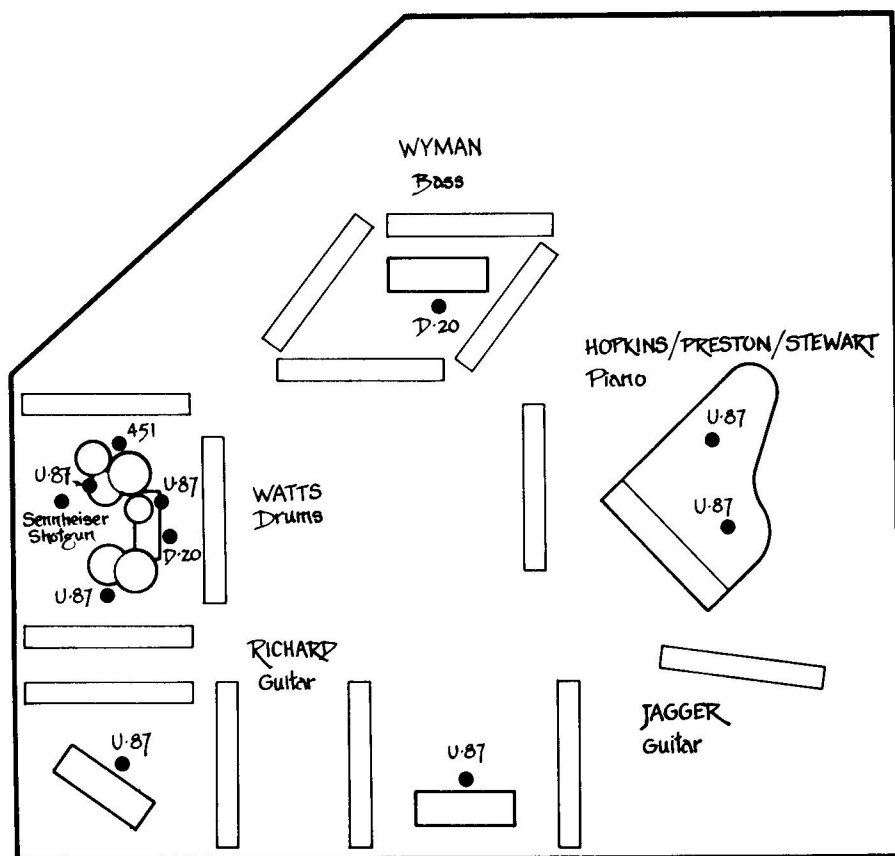


Figure 1 STUDIO SETUP FOR "It's Only Rock 'n Roll" LP (Musicland Studios, Munich)

to phasing because it's changing the phase angles on the sound all the time. It's just a physical means of doing it, rather than electronic. When you get a lot of distortion on something that's going through a Leslie, it's exactly the same sound as a phasing trip.

PL: What kind of guitar does Jagger play?

AJ: He usually plays a Gibson. A black Les Paul. This is Mick Taylor on bass, probably all direct.

PL: Kepexed?

AJ: Doubt it. Americans are into Kepexing a lot, but I don't know anyone else who is.

PL: What kind of bass does Mick Taylor play? He consistently gets a treblier sound than the others.

AJ: He just uses one of Bill's, actually. It's because he plays it like a guitar — he plays pretty close to the bridge and hits it in the same way as he would a guitar. He's a guitar player, not a bass player.

PL: How is it that Glyn came to mix this tune?

AJ: I expect maybe Mick just thought "Oh, Glyn'd really be able to do this one good" and phoned him up.

PL: What is a mixing session for the Stones like?

AJ: Pretty intense. When I first started mixing with them — which was on "Sticky Fingers" — I remember getting off a plane and going straight to the studio one time. I'd been up for like two days, and I went straight to the studio

and mixed three tracks in four hours. "Dead Flowers" was one of them, "Wild Horses" was another. Later on, when we got into 16-track, things became much slower. I remember we had to work very hard to make it sound anywhere close to good with "Exile."

PL: Who would participate in the mixing?

AJ: Keith would usually kind of sit there without saying very much, and Mick would be wandering in and out. He would maybe stay for a half hour, then wander out, and then wander back in again. "No, I want the vocals to be like this. They've got to be like this." Then you'd try them like that, and he would come back in later to hear what you'd done. They're fairly easy to mix with, because they're not terribly specific. They just let you work on it until you say "Okay, I'm happy with the overall sound. What ideas do you have now?"

PL: Would they make a distinction between, say, "reverb" and "delay"?

AJ: Mick might. He's the only one who really gets in on the mixing. Mick Taylor used to come around, but the lead guitar always ended up by being too loud, and so they asked him to leave. During "Exile," I remember Keith turning around one day and going "Listen, man, you're great on stage, but you're awful in the studio. Can you just go away for a bit?" I disagree with that, myself. Mick Taylor never played anything that I disliked and thought shouldn't be there. Whenever he played, I always got a rush.

PL: How many different delay speeds do you use? Will you use whatever's available, or do you usually have a definite speed in mind?

AJ: A bit of both, I guess. An Ampex at 15 is one we use a lot, and I've always thought of it as a definite thing, myself. We used Studers — which have roughly the same head gap as Ampex — for the mixes of "Exile on Main St." and "Goats Head Soup." Another one we've used is the 3M delay, at 15. The 3M has got a very different sort of block, with one head facing this way and one head facing that way, and so you get a longer delay time. We used that, if I recall, on Mick Taylor's guitar on "Shine a Light."

PL: How about "Shake Your Hips"?

AJ: That was an Ampex 440 at 15 ips. I remember, it's that old machine in the reduction room at Olympic.

PL: Did you ever use any non-standard or VSOed intervals?

AJ: Yes, if I'm using it as just a tape repeat, not for driving the plate. We would sometimes use VSOing to get it in time with the song. I think we used an odd speed on "Rocks Off" — the second rhythm guitar.

PL: What do you perceive as Jimmy's contributions to the whole Rolling Stones process?

AJ: One of his trips, certainly, is drums. He's such a great percussionist himself that he was always coming up with good ideas for the drums — for sound and for what the guy should play. He really influenced Charlie's playing on a lot of Stones things. Something like "Honky Tonk Women" — that really sounds to me like a Jimmy Miller trip. I wasn't at that particular session, but from listening to it I'm pretty sure that he had a lot to do with those drums.

Another thing about Jimmy, he had the capacity for remembering which were the best out of like 300 takes! You could do a track for

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three days, and he'd say "Oh, let's hear that fifth one on reel three from the first day, and then the second one on reel six from day two, and then we'll listen to the one we've just done and see which one's the best."

You're not uptight with him at all. When I first started doing sessions, I was only a kid and here I was working with Jimmy and Traffic and those kind of people, and I was well paranoid and scared stiff! With Jimmy, you felt that if you didn't get it right immediately, it was okay because he was quite sure that you would in the end. If you made a mistake, he'd say "That's okay, man, don't worry about it." He was great like that. He just made you feel good, and so you ended up getting it together.

JIMMY MILLER ALIVE and WELL

Producer Jimmy Miller, rumored to have died under bizarre circumstances in England earlier this summer, it seems is quite alive and living in the hills above Los Angeles. When asked, recently, for some irrefutable proof of his continued existence, so as to convince any skeptics, he replied, "I'm building a pool, aren't I."

PL: Just out of interest, what do you think of the "Blind Faith" record?

AJ: I think it's a great album. It was done in a rather funny sort of way, though. I did that one at Olympic, where Stevie sings "Come down off your tree . . ." and all that stuff. "Can't Find My Way Home" — that's the one. God,

that was a weird session! We did that whole thing on two mikes. Eric's playing like a big lute — an 8-string lute — and Stevie's playing like a small nylon string acoustic guitar. We put a mike in front of each guitar, and Ginger and Rick were just picked up from those two mikes.

PL: How many tracks of tape have the Stones used since you've been working with them?

AJ: Let's see . . . "Satanic Majesties" was 4-track, "Beggars Banquet" was 4-track, "Let It Bleed" was 8-track, as was "Sticky Fingers," I think. We never worked 16-track till "Exile on Main St."

PL: So you mean all those great drum sounds were live-mixed to two tracks, with the bass drum going to both sides?

AJ: Sure, man. Most of the best sounds were done on 4-track, actually. I was listening to "She Comes in Colors" yesterday on the radio, and there's so much stuff on that.

A lot of those 4-track mixes you couldn't possibly have done if you were using 16-track tape. For instance, on "She Comes in Colors," it's drums, bass, one acoustic, an electric guitar?, a piano, strings, background vocals, horns, and there's a lead vocal, and then there's an ad-lib vocal as well. That's 10 tracks! I think we went 4-to-4-to-4 to get it all in there. The advantage in doing it that way was that you really only had half the stuff to worry about, and so you could get into all sorts of little trips that you just wouldn't be able to do when you've got 16 things going at once.

Nowadays, you'll have your basic track and say "Well, that's pretty good. We can always double-track that rhythm guitar, and maybe drop the bass a little where it goes . . ." In

those days, the basic track had to be incredible, and really turn you on without any overdubs or anything.

PL: To pursue the drums thing a bit further, you've gotten so many terrific drum sounds . . . Could I possibly invigle you into remembering what you did on "Sway," for example?

AJ: Yeah, I remember that pretty good. I got the impression that probably no one else ever would, but I like the sound on that track too. That was a great track.

I'll tell you all this stuff because it's interesting for me to remember, and I'd love people to be interested, but I don't want them to think that I'm saying "For this exact sound, do this." I mean, you can take a drummer into the studio and do exactly what I did, and it might not sound anything like "Sway"! You might have to do something entirely different to get that sound.

A lot of the drum sound on "Sway" has to do with the overhead mike and how it's equalized. We put it right over the snare, and that's where most of the snare sound comes from. With Charlie, I always used to have to add a lot of 2K to the overhead. Really, I think I've done that on most of the things I've ever done with him.

PL: Why is that? Is it the way he plays? The sound of his heads?

AJ: Probably a bit of both. I remember on this one that I did spend a lot of time on the drums. Also, I got him to tune his snare differently — it's tuned very low.

PL: What did you do for the drum sound on "When the Levee Breaks"?

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snare	Beyer M-160	B		+8 @ 10K	+4 @ 3K	+4 @ 60Hz		&
overhead	Neumann U-67	C			+8 @ 2K			drums R
floor tom	Neumann U-67	D			+4 @ 2K	-4 @ 60Hz		drums L
tom-tom	Neumann U-67	E			+4 @ 2K	-4 @ 60Hz		drums R

Fig. 2 Drum miking and modifications for "Sway"

MIKE FOR:	TYPE	INPUT	LIMITER/COMPRESSOR	EQUALIZATION			ECHO	TRACK
drums L	Beyer M-160	A		+8 @ 10K	+6 @ 3.5K	+8 @ 60Hz	Binson	drums L
drums R	Beyer M-160	B		+8 @ 10K	+6 @ 3.5K	+8 @ 60Hz	Binson	drums R

Fig. 3 Drum miking and modifications for "When the Levee Breaks"

AJ: That one was done at Headley Grange. It's the house that Zeppelin rented in Berkshire for the sessions, where we all stayed as well. It was really grotty, actually. Sound-wise, it wasn't particularly brilliant either. That's not true, really. At the time I thought the sound was terrible, but it turned out quite all right.

I'd just been working on "Sticky Fingers" with the Stones' truck, and was telling Pagey what a gas it was to work in a house instead of a studio. Maybe they'd rehearsed there before or something, and he says "Oh, I know a great place we can go to." I wanted them to go to Stargroves, but he said it was too expensive, so we went to Headley Grange.

For the drums on "When the Levee Breaks," I had Bonzo out in the hall with the door closed, and the others were in the room next to the hall. The place has a staircase that goes around the walls, which is where I put the

mikes at about the first floor. They were quite some way away from the kit, I'd say about 15 or 20 feet. I used M-160s which are very directional — and I pointed both of them right at the kit. Obviously, I wasn't trying for any sort of accurate spatial reproduction of the drums with that kind of mike placement, because the only difference they were picking up was the sound of the room. We only took left and right sides, because with Bonham, you don't need a separate mike for his kick drum. The way he plays his kick drum, it has the same kinds of dynamics as a snare or any other kind of drum.

If I remember correctly, both sides were going through F-700 compressors set to the slowest attack and the quickest release times possible. You don't want a very fast attack on the limiters, because it won't let any of the actual sound of the skin hitting the snare

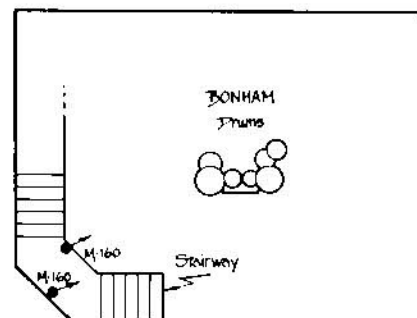


Figure 4 AERIAL VIEW OF HALLWAY AT HEADLEY GRANGE
DETAILING DRUM MIKING FOR "When The Levee Breaks"

through. It'll make it kind of dead, you know? When you've got a quick release time, it'll make the sound even livelier still, because the limiter stops working immediately and turns up the sound of the room. Also, with it that compressed, every time you hit the bass drum, it would drown everything else out, and every time you hit the snare, it would drown everything else out. It kind of balances itself that way.

I also used a Binson echo unit. It's a delay unit that works with a metal drum instead of tape. It has a great sound, that thing — the return off it doesn't sound anything like the signal. I fed the Binson into each channel so it was going through the compressors as well, meaning that the echo was being affected and changing in relation to what drum he's hitting.

PL: Was all of this in response to a sound they asked you to get?

AJ: No, just something that I thought would be nice to try.

PL: What's the strangest studio technique you've ever used?

AJ: There are a few guitar things I've done that have been kind of weird, like standing in the middle of the room and twirling the mike 'round yer head while it's on its lead. I remember doing that on some Jethro Tull things. I mixed their first album and recorded their second one, which I did quite a bit of production on too, because Ian Anderson wasn't terribly versed in all that stuff at the time. I even played bass on one of the cuts!

PL: Do you have any sort of equipment preferences?

AJ: Well, I've yet to work in a place where I've been 100% happy with the monitors, if there is

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such a place.

PL: Do you have a favorite studio?

AJ: Well, it's hard to say again, Paul, because it's also a question of what you're used to. Say, for example, that you've done an album at Island Studios or something, and you'll get on really well with the monitors — you'll get really used to them and know exactly what you're listening to. Now, you can go back there with another band, but for some reason you'll be going "I don't know . . . these monitors don't seem to be quite right, do they?" With boards it's very easy because it's very black-and-white, but with monitoring it's not. It's very much a matter of what you're used to.

Most people have a main studio that they work at, and then they have just like two or three others. I haven't been able to do that for a long, long time, which is really a bit of a drag. If you work in one studio for a year every day, you get to know the monitoring inside and out and exactly what all the equipment's capable of. If something's not sounding right, you've got a very specific idea of why not, whereas if you're working in a place you haven't been to for three years, you can really only guess.

PL: I've heard that there are English and American "schools" of mixing. Do we mix differently than most English engineers?

AJ: There is a definite difference between the English way of doing things and the American way of doing things, but very hard to define exactly. I guess that these days, the two things are probably quite similar, but when I first came over here, I was struck by the fact that American studios were so very "functional." There weren't any real "rock & roll"-type

studios here, except for maybe the Record Plant and a few others. Over here, people were still using pots instead of faders, a lot of very old mikes, and they would have maybe one kind of compressor, which they'd have maybe four or five of. In England, you'd have maybe four of one kind, two of another, and then maybe one each of two other kinds.

PL: What is a "rock & roll studio," as opposed to some other type?

AJ: A rock & roll studio is just a studio where you can record rock bands easily. In the last five or six years, because so much recording is now with rock & roll bands, people have been building studios where you can't do very much else. You can't do a large session with a whole bunch of guys. They build rock & roll studios kind of dead, fairly small, different-colored lights . . . I actually prefer a larger room, myself.

PL: I'd imagine that Olympic would be one of your favorites.

AJ: Definitely. It has a great feeling about it, and I just like it there. Of course, I've said "Let's go to Olympic!" and taken people there and they've not liked it at all. You can get, in Olympic No. 1, probably one of the worst sounds possible. It's not an easy place to get a sound in, but when you get it, boy, it sounds great!

PL: On what record do you think you really got that sound?

AJ: I suppose the Derek and the Dominos album that never got released, which I think is the best sound I've ever gotten. I doubt that Stigwood even knows about those tapes! I'm

trying to resurrect that project — I think we even have enough songs for an album.

PL: How would you compare the way the Stones record to, say, Led Zeppelin?

AJ: With the Stones, it's a very jammy "Let's all play together and then we can refine it" approach. I would say that Zeppelin, though, has pretty defined methods of working. The things I did with them were always done in a similar sort of way — you might even call it a formula. Page's got the riff or whatever it is they're going to do, and the others just pick up on it. They've got a pretty good idea of what it's got to be much earlier on.

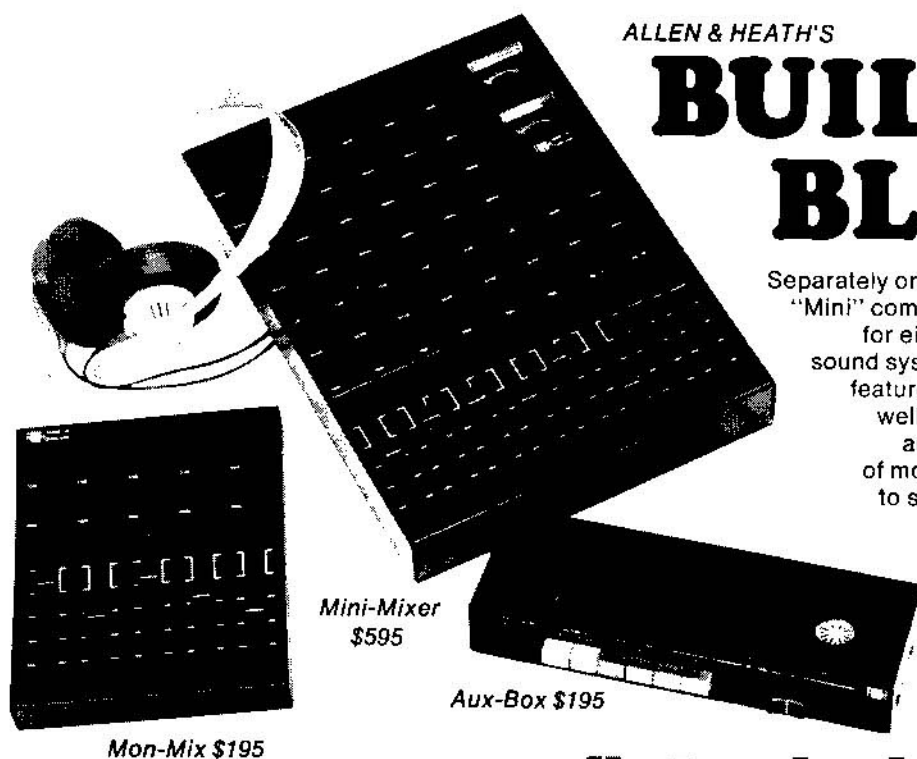
PL: Is it because they've rehearsed more?

AJ: No, they haven't rehearsed beforehand either. You see, Zeppelin is an incredibly professional "musician"-type band, and that's the way they work.

The Stones were like that when I first started working with them. I'm thinking of an early session for "You Can't Always Get What You Want" — one that didn't get used. I remember they turned up at the studio, and Mick walks in and immediately sits down and starts playing it. Around the time of "Sticky Fingers," it became "Well, what are we gonna do tonight?" "I don't know, I haven't got anything. Maybe Keith's got something. Keith, have you got anything?" "What?"

PL: How about Zeppelin's bass-and-drums sound?

AJ: With Zeppelin, you go out in the studio and you stand there, and I tell you, it is such an immense sound when those three guys are playing together. You think "Well, it's got to



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sound like this," and so you try to get as close to the sound you hear them making as you can. Their records are just an attempt to get what they sound like in a real situation. I mean, John Bonham gets such a great sound in the studio. He's got the loudest kick drum I've ever heard - an incredibly loud, fantastic sound. It's like someone shooting a gun! With any drummer who's that amazing, you can't get any mikes too close to his snare or you won't be able to get that monstrous sound. With him, I used to put a directional mike over his shoulder and just aim it at the snare, and use it in conjunction with the overhead. He's terrific, he really is.

Ginger Baker was actually the first guy who taught me about the dynamics of drums. With all the people I'd worked with before - which wasn't that vast an amount - it had been "Let's get a drum sound." Ginger said "Here's my sound. Get it." Not quite as heavy as that, but along those lines. I remember - I was so naive in those days - I suggested doing something to his bass drum one time, and he got a bit upset! I learned quite a bit from Ginger, actually.

PL: How about John Paul Jones? Is that pretty much how he sounds out in the studio?

AJ: Yeah. Even though he's got a big sound, he plays very, very cleanly. I used to put him on two tracks - one miked and one direct. Being a studio musician for so long, he was quite conscious of what was going on with his sound. He'd often say "Let's have a little more of the direct" or whatever.

Bass is a very difficult instrument to record. With guitar, if you're not getting a good sound, you can say "Well, let's try another guitar," and maybe for that number the guy changes from a Gibson to a Strat and you've solved your problem. Or you can change the amp, or

change the mike, or run the guitar through a Leslie speaker and you'll be getting somewhere. With bass, if the sound's not right, you don't have as many options. You can change the mike, but most studios will have only two or three types of mikes that are going to work on the bass. You can change the sound on the amp a bit, probably not too much, though, because the guy won't want a sound that's radically different from the one he usually gets. Sometimes you'll go through a whole day where you just cannot get a bass sound.

PL: Why do you think this is? Is it the way he's playing? Humidity? Is it something mystical?

AJ: It's something pretty mystical, I really think. You can walk in one day and get a terrible sound with a setup, and walk in the next day - nothing's different - and you get a fantastic sound. Or you can go through all these changes on the bass and go "Yes, that's much better," and the next day you'll listen to the first take you did and then a take you did four hours later when you'd done all this supposed "work" on the bass, and they sound exactly the same!

PL: You've recorded so many fine guitarists that I thought it would be interesting to compare their approaches and techniques in the studio. How about Jimmy Page?

AJ: Well, he plays fairly loud in the studio, but you won't have any serious leakage problems with him because he gets a fairly contained kind of sound. With Zeppelin in general, because there are only three pieces and because Bonzo and JPJ play equally loud, you don't have separation problems. Pagey pretty much runs the band as far as the recording goes, and

he usually has a pretty definite idea of what he wants to hear.

PL: Just how engineering-oriented is he?

AJ: He knows the things that can be done - move the mikes around, re-EQ, turn down. He might do something like specify what kind of delay he'd like and say "I want a 7½ on this." He's into that sort of stuff.

PL: Do you consider him a skillful producer?

AJ: Oh yeah, I think he's very good.

PL: He often punches in on his solos, doesn't he?

AJ: Yeah, he does that a lot. I was surprised when I first started working with them, because I figured he'd just sail through the guitar things, but he doesn't. He really works on them. I think that a couple times he had hassles doing a solo - where he just couldn't come up with any good ideas or whatever - and so he took a rough mix of the song home and practiced to it. He's often quite meticulous. I really like working with Pagey. If you've got an idea, he'll always listen, and if it's a good one, he'll use it.

PL: What would be an example of one of your good ideas?

AJ: "Stairway to Heaven." He came into the studio and said "I've got this great song and it's going to build a lot." He works a lot that way. Often he'll have a concept for a track that will have three or four different sections. I helped with the middle part - the 12-strings and where they came in.

PL: How about the solo? Basically, what take was it?

AJ: I couldn't tell you, really. It would be quite a few, I'd imagine, as he took a long time doing it. We had been punching in a lot, so it could have taken two or three hours to get it all together. As far as the sound goes, it's obviously compressed, bit of top, bit of midrange, and probably the same again when it was mixed. I remember he was quite pleased with it when we were done.

PL: How about Mick Taylor? How does he record?

AJ: Well, Mick Taylor always plays incredibly loud. That's how he gets all of that sustain. It's not just for tone alone - he likes that level as well. Because he does play so loud, you have to screen him off a lot. You tend to have him the furthest out of all the musicians, sort of on the outside. More than just level, he has a very penetrating sound. He also has a lot of bottom end, which you don't really notice so much when you're listening to him with the other instruments. It goes around the room like mad, though, and we often have trouble with it coming in through the drums or the piano. This happens even when he's using a Tele, which is a bit surprising.


As far as his equipment goes, he usually uses Fender amps, like a Twin Reverb or something. He also has one of those little Fender Leslies. When we had 16 tracks, I'd often take two channels of him - one the amp and one the Leslie - and send them to opposite sides in the mix. As a general rule, he doesn't use a lot of effects in the studio. If they're about, you can ask him to use them and he'll give it a try, but he's not totally into it.

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listen to Mick on something like "Stop Breaking Down" — he's about the best white bottleneck player there is! That's what I really like about it — not the "engineering" as much as working with people who really bring out the best in you. You hear this music coming through and you can't let 'em down — you've got to try to get the best sound possible because it's turning you on so much!

PL: How would Mick Taylor talk to you about his sound? Would he say "It's too strident" or "too close-miked"?

AJ: No, he wouldn't say anything like that. He would always be fairly unimpressed with his sound as a rule. One I remember that he *did* like was "Hide Your Love" — he was well impressed with that. We took it in fairly hot with lots of leakage. That's what he likes.

PL: Is it true that the solo on "Winter" was done live?

AJ: Yes. Amazing, isn't it? He would quite often play solos on the track, and they came out that good quite regularly. It's not like that was a coincidence — you know, he'll do it every time!

PL: Did he seem particularly happy with that solo?

AJ: He never mentioned anything about it. I used to flip out about it and tell him how great it was, but he never responded in any way. He's very humble in some ways, and not at all in others. He'll do things like want to overdub bass on something that Bill has already played on — which isn't terribly humble — and then on the other hand, you'll tell him what an amazing guitar player he is and he won't say

anything at all.

PL: What did you do for the sound?

AJ: Most of that is because there's a lot of leakage. Probably added some midrange and a bit of top.

PL: How does Keith Richard record?

AJ: Well, Keith is always a bit of a challenge to record because he drives his equipment so hard. You know, everyone else will be coming in for playbacks, but he won't — he'll still be out there playing! With him, I'm always a bit worried that there's too much crackle-y kind of distortion, as opposed to harmonic-type distortion. It might sound quite good in the room, but you put a microphone on it and it sounds different. His sound is always real big in the studio, but when you mike it, it loses a lot of its size.

PL: Are there any things in particular that you've learned to do to get the best recorded sound on him?

AJ: You don't get the impression that Keith is into it very much, but he really knows quite a lot about his equipment. I've picked up a lot of things from him and from working with him.

Mike position is especially important with Keith. Sometimes, for example, if Charlie's not getting the part together properly and Keith wants to really communicate with him, he'll bring his amp over and point it right into the drums. Now this presents all sorts of miking problems, but luckily, with them you'll have plenty of time to experiment with the miking — where you really couldn't with a group that only runs a song through a few times before they start doing takes.

PL: How particular is he about his recorded sound?

AJ: Not extremely, I would say. He doesn't usually say very much about the guitar sound unless it's really terrible, and then he'll point that out. Sometimes they'll do a take and Keith will say "That's a great take. Maybe we'll use that," and I'll say "But the sound on that guitar's so bad, Keith," and he'll go "Oh, it's all right."

PL: What would be an example of a master take where that happened?

AJ: Several things from "Exile." "Tumbling Dice" probably would have been one... maybe "Rocks Off" as well, but that came out all right in the end.

PL: Whatever happened, the guitars on "Rocks Off" have a much tighter sound than most of the other tunes.

AJ: That's the thing I was saying earlier on about bass sounds. On "Rocks Off," we'd been getting a terrible guitar sound all the time, but that one particular day — I didn't change anything, they didn't seem to change anything — the sound was that much better.

PL: What sorts of things would Keith say if he wanted a different guitar sound?

AJ: He might say something like "Compress it" or "Add some more top," but that isn't what he means, really. He means *do* something to it!

PL: Were you there for the "Sympathy" solo?

AJ: No. I don't know too much about that one, really. Sounds like Eddie Kramer freaking out with the equalization to me.

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