

Blue & Lonesome IORR

“Sometime in early 2015 Keith called me and said, ‘Listen to Blue and Lonesome, you’ll love it,’... and I did,” is how Ronnie Wood remembers it all beginning. ‘Blue and Lonesome’ is the song that launched an album. In December 2015 the Rolling Stones gathered in Mark Knopfler’s British Grove Studios in West London to begin work on a batch of new songs for their first studio album since a Bigger Bang in 2005. Grove Studios is reportedly gorgeous with its high ceilings and blond-wood floors. It is also equipped with a mix of vintage and modern equipment. But new digs always have to be broken in and these were new digs for the Stones. Keith Richards said, “I *know* the Rolling Stones. I know that recording new music in a room they’re not familiar with, there’s sometimes going to be weeks before the room breaks in.”

The Title

Ronnie Wood remembers getting a fax from Keith Richards before the sessions began. In it, Richards upped the ante and told him to learn Little Walter’s “Blue and Lonesome” as a potential icebreaker for the new studio. Two days in to the new studio at British Grove the band was struggling with some of the new music and Richards felt his premonition coming true. Here is how Richards described it in October, 2016, “(The band was) a little unsure of the studio and the sound of it... I *know* the Rolling Stones. I know that recording new music in a room they’re not familiar with, there’s sometimes going to be weeks before the room breaks in. The room is fighting me. It’s fighting the band. The sound is not coming... I looked at Ronnie and said, *Let’s put a hold on this new stuff while we try and figure things out and get the room warmed up. O.K.: “Blue and Lonesome”*... Suddenly the room is obeying and there’s something happening – a sound is happening and it was so good... And then, *That was damned good, man!* Mick turns around and says, *Let’s do Howlin’ Wolf’s “Commit a Crime”* — and it really just led from there. No preplanning, no real instigation. Suddenly Mick just jumped on this train that he’s so good at... It just bloody happened. That was the amazing thing and the beauty of it.”

After two takes of “Blue and Lonesome,” Jagger had surprised his bandmates by suggesting they do some more blues covers. Don Was said, “Can you go home tonight and make a list of what we’re going to do? If we’re going to do more blues, you’d better make a list.” Jagger said, “I just went into my computer and went into the blues songs I had in there... and I made a list of what I thought we’d do that day and wrote it down and went into the studio and I just shouted out let’s do this. And if people said yes then we did it, and if people said oh, I don’t know about that one, I’d say OK, then this one, because I had enough.” Just like that, without discussing what they were doing or acknowledging they were making an album, *Blue & Lonesome* was conceived and born in just three recording sessions, over two to five days depending on whose memory you trust. Charlie Watts said, “Nobody bothered with retakes – it wasn’t conceived as an album.” Richards said, “It was only at the end, when we’d got 12 tracks and Don Was and I were talking together, and Mick was there and he was saying, this is an album. You can’t chop this up.” It is the first Stones album to contain no Jagger/Richards compositions. It is the first album since *Dirty Work* (1986) that Jagger did not play any guitar. It is the first album since *It’s Only Rock ‘n Roll* (1974) that did not have Richards on a lead vocal.

It was inevitable that the unplanned album would take its name from the song that launched it. In October 2016, before the album's December 2, 2016 release, Jagger said of the title and album cover, "I thought blues album = blue! Obviously. So then (the record company) sent me a blue, and it was all kind of grey and wishy washy. I said no, it's got to be bright, really blue, electric blue. So that's why we came up with that color. I think it works."

Jagger describes the thinking about releasing this album. "I said to the record company - which is, let's face it, they're not *blues* people, I mean they're very nice people and some I know very well - that: *What we've made is a blues album but what do we do with it because we're in the middle of making a new album?* Was it marketable as a separate album? Or would you like to wait till the new album is finished and put it out with it? So that you've got like 12 new things and you've got 12 blues things, which is kind of a nice package. I mean, you've got a lot of stuff suddenly. That would have been interesting. And I said, *You think about that, you're the ones that are going to market it. Which way would you want to go?* Cause I'm interested to see how you can (laughs) possibly market this blues album? Come on. Which traditionally is not going to interest any one - it's very niche. There's nothing wrong with it. But who's going to hear it? Is anyone going to go on Spotify and play this blues album? No one's going to listen to it. That to me is part of it, you know. You want to make a record but you want people to hear it, don't you? It's not supposed to just be for your family! *That's nice, Dad...* Probably the record company said, *Well, the other (album)'s never gonna come - we might as well put this one out.* I don't blame 'em. I probably would have done the same thing. 'Cause: *Now I got something, might as well put it out.*"

The Cover



Studio Fury had been working with the Rolling Stones since at least 2012 when they designed the cover art for *The Rolling Stones - Some Girls Live in Texas '78*. They had also done a number of jobs for the Stones From The Vault series. This gave the Studio the opportunity to get to know the Stones team and to convince them of the quality of their work. They were selected to design the *Blue & Lonesome* cover.

Stephen Kennedy and Andy Penny of Studio Fury took on the responsibilities of Art Director and Designer, respectively. In the course of their work on this album they

pitched many different concepts for the album design. One of them was to change the iconic Stones logo from red to blue for this blues album. Jagger liked the blue logo idea best and worked with the Studio to get to the vibrant blue color that makes the cover so distinctive. The left side of the logo blends into the album cover's sea of blue playing on the recognizability of this logo, which is clearly evident and powerful despite the fact that about a third of its outline is missing.

As has often been the Stone's practice, the band name is omitted from the cover. Once, the darkened image of the Stones themselves was sufficient identification. In 2016 it only took two-thirds of an alternatively colored logo to announce the Rolling Stones. Some have criticized the cover noting that the well-known artists and photographers who have designed past album covers have given way to a corporate logo. Fair enough.



The vinyl release was a double album with the track lists of the four album sides (A, B, C, D) listed on the rear. The logo is a little better defined and there is more red on the back cover's tongue image. A tiny version of the traditional logo is found in the lower left corner.



The Gatefold

Several video recordings were made of the band while recording tracks at British Groves Studios. Some of these were used for promotion and others for music videos. All of the photographs used for the gatefold and inner sleeves were stills pulled by Studio Fury from moving image clips during post-production of those videos. It has been widely reported that Jagger did not play guitar on this album so it is most likely that the video recording was staged rather than an actual recording session as Jagger is shown seated, singing and playing a guitar in the gatefold. Wood is to his right playing guitar, Watts comes next with his drum kit followed by Richards on the far right, smiling and playing.



There is some question about the timing of the photos. The Stones recorded *Blue & Lonesome* at British Groves Studios on the 12th, 14th, and 15th of December, 2015. The video could have been made then but there had not been a definitive decision to make an album at that point. The author speculates that the video, hence the album shots, were from the period April 7-mid-April 2016 when the Stones were working on a few overdubs and started mixing their blues recordings from the previous December for the eventual *Blue & Lonesome* album. Studio Fury declined to confirm the dates.

Inner Sleeves

The sleeve for the first vinyl disc features a photo of Jagger before a microphone dressed in the same clothes he wears in the gatefold. The track lists for Sides A and B occupy the upper left corner of the sleeve. Turn the sleeve over and find a photo of Richards playing guitar with a set of headphones on. He is wearing a long-sleeved blue t-shirt instead of the clothes he sports in the gatefold. Watts face is seen in the lower right corner. There is no print on this side.





The sleeve for the second vinyl disc features Watts at his drum kit. The picture was taken from behind and off to the side so only the left profile of Watts' face is visible. He too is wearing different clothes from the gatefold photo. The track list for sides C and D are printed in the upper left corner. Ronnie Wood graces the flipside of this sleeve. Wood wears the clothes of the gatefold shot, less the vest. Album credits are printed across the left side of the sleeve. The ubiquitous Stones logo appears at the bottom of the credits. These sleeve sides appear as part of a booklet for the CD release of the album.

SIDE C

RIDE 'EM ON DOWN
HATE TO SEE YOU GO
HOO DOO BLUES

SIDE D

LITTLE RAIN
JUST LIKE I TREAT YOU
I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY

572 012-4





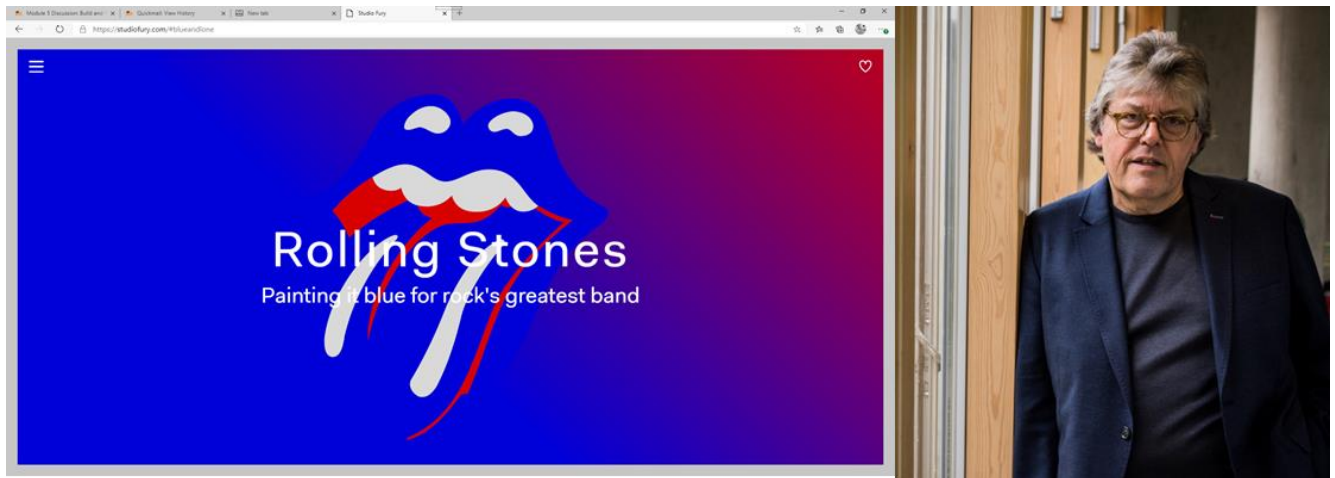
The photographs appearing in the album were selected by Fury Studio and approved by the Stones. Fury Studio said that once the album cover is approved along with an Ad Map, which provides guidelines for posters, billboards, and that sort of thing, the Band and management are happy for local territory labels to approve materials so long as they follow the guidelines and artwork templates the Studio provides. Thus, materials like those seen below can be locally produced if they are consistent with what amounts to a style manual produced by Fury Studio and approved by the Stones.



Liner Notes

It has become a bit more challenging to describe the packaging as part of the album art because there are so many different release formats these days. The vinyl release of *Blue & Lonesome* had no liner notes. The standard CD release contained a 16-page booklet with six pages of liner notes summarizing the Stones' love affair with the blues. The CD Deluxe Edition contains a small hardback booklet with 72-pages and 25 pages of liner notes detailing the Stones devotion to the blues. Richard Havers wrote the liner notes for these Stones album releases. Havers, now deceased, has authored numerous books about the Stones including *On Air In The Sixties*, the official history of the Rolling Stones' BBC recording sessions. He co-wrote Bill Wyman's *Blues Odyssey* and collaborated with Wyman on his *Rolling With The Stones* and *The Stones: A History In Cartoons*. Other books include *The Rolling Stones: In The Beginning* and *Rolling Stones 50*. The *Blue & Lonesome* liner notes would be his last writing about the Stones.

Cast and Crew



Studio Fury (left) emphatically expressed their desire to be identified as a studio rather than as the individuals in the studio who worked on the project. Richard Havers was the prolific writer who continued a tradition begun decades ago by Andrew Loog Oldham.

The Logo



A logo represents who you are, what you do, and your company's values. The logo is one of the most effective marketing tools a company could have. The best logos are unique, adaptable and effective in conveying a company's values. I give you The Rolling Stones logo.

No doubt many of the people who may read this own one or more pieces of clothing that sport this logo. The logo or some representation of it has appeared on a number of album and record sleeves as the sample below shows. It's a great logo, but enough's enough when it comes to album art.

We get it. We love it. We buy it. We wear it. But many of us enjoy the Stones' tradition of getting some of the world's best photographers, artists, and designers to acquaint us with an album. Album art is still considered a vital part of the listening experience to many. The Stones covers begin to feel like corporate decisions, tweak the logo and slap it on an album cover. That is a

long way from the statements the Stones have made with so many of their covers over the years. Here's hoping for a return to form in the future.



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