

HONK

In March, 2019 Tobias Hall announced the Stones new compilation when he Tweeted the following:



The album was released April 19. On November 27, 2019 Tobias Hall was still grinning when he Tweeted, "2019 highlights part 2: Illustrating the cover of a [@therollingstones](#) album will go down as a career highlight for me, thanks again to the guys at [@studiofury](#) for getting me on board 🙌." (That is a raised hands emoji.) *HONK* appeared 2,349 days after *Grrr!*, the Stones grand 50th anniversary compilation. It's fun to see this young artist's enthusiasm.

Let's take a dive into its story. Asked how he got involved with the *HONK* project. Hall said, "I was commissioned by Studio Fury, who art directed and designed the sleeve artwork." Studio Fury has worked on *Blue and Lonesome* as well as *HONK*. Where did the name come from?

Title

Studio Fury was asked: "How did the album get the name HONK? Do you know how or why it was so named?" They replied, "Yes, but it's not public knowledge so no comment I'm afraid." The origins of this title remain a mystery at this point, in fact that has become the Holy Grail of Stones album titles. It was already determined when Tobias Hall, artist and designer began his work. That leaves us room to speculate and who speculates better than fans? Discussion at popular sites like iorr.or and SteveHoffman offered some ideas.

Negative comments are always in more abundant supply than positive ones and this holds true with the title. Here is a representative post, "I think the design and the colors are nice, and as a whole it's a nice cover imo - it's the HONK! part that turns it in to a cartoon and sort of ruins it." This evoked responses like this one, "Agree the HONK name leaves something to be desired... Marketing must tell them that easy four letter words (insert joke here) must work at grabbing attention or something."

The speculation continues. One fan figured, "I don't know whose idea the title Honk was. I'm still thinking it might be because Hamrick (Mick's girlfriend Melanie Hamrick, a ballet dancer) begins with H and ends with K, and swans honk. She dances in Swan Lake nearly every year." Perhaps we should stop here, surely that nails the truth.

Thinking Studio Fury might find the speculation amusing they were asked, "Is there anyone you know who could give me some info on the origin of the title? That is always a neat part of the story. There is much speculation including it is for Mick's girlfriend, Hamrick because of the H and K and because she dances in Swann Lake each year?" Their reply was "😂 It's not that. Sorry - my lips are sealed." Dammit.

Linguists had other ideas. A Scott said honking in Scottish means emitting a foul odour or poorly thought of. He then added that was an apt description of the album. Compilations always run into strong criticism. A German noted this is slang for moron. A fellow Deutschlender said he thought, "Honk" is a rather unfortunate name for the German market, since the word is used as a slang term for "ditz" or "idiot" here. Will the Deluxe edition be called "Vollhonk" (complete idiot) here?"

An out-of-the-box speculator asked, "Is it like..."honk honk (car horn)--don't forget about these other classics from our catalog!!" or... 'Honk' as in short for "Honky Tonk Women"? or...the childish 'honk honk sound' people use when...interacting with a certain part of a person's body. ahem..." A more confident fan insisted, "Honk means vomit. Seriously. I am amazed no-one has brought that up !!!!! No, really."

Going in a different direction, another fan offered, "Man when I first heard the title *HONK* I thought this would be some kind of country/acoustic-leaning compilation of classic Stones deep

cuts and a few outtakes spiked with a couple of brand new country-flavored Stones tune.” He forgot to add, “But I was wrong.”

Rolling Stone magazine found the title misleading, noting “there’s nary a “Honky Tonk Woman” or even a “Country Honk” to be heard.” Everybody’s got an opinion. Nobody knows anything worth knowing about this title though.

Hoping to get some clarity around the name, Hall was asked where the title came from. He replied, “I’m not entirely sure where the name came from to be honest!’ By the time he was engaged for the project the name was already settled.

The Cover

Designer Daily said, “Using the Rolling Stones iconic tongue logo, a layered font, some textures, and bright colors, Hall illustrated the typographic elements of the powerful brand created with Studio Fury... The color scheme works perfectly on every application, with a special mention for the vinyl cover.” The *HONK* album cover, generally was better received than its predecessor *Grrr!* was. If fan reaction is the gauge, that was not a high hurdle to leap. Reactions ranged from, “Love the cover” to “The cover art is horrible *again*.” Stones fans are a tough bunch to please.

Studio Fury was the art designer for this album. They described their role like this, “As creative directors we came up with the whole visual concept. And then choose Tobias (from a short list we pulled together) to illustrate our idea.”

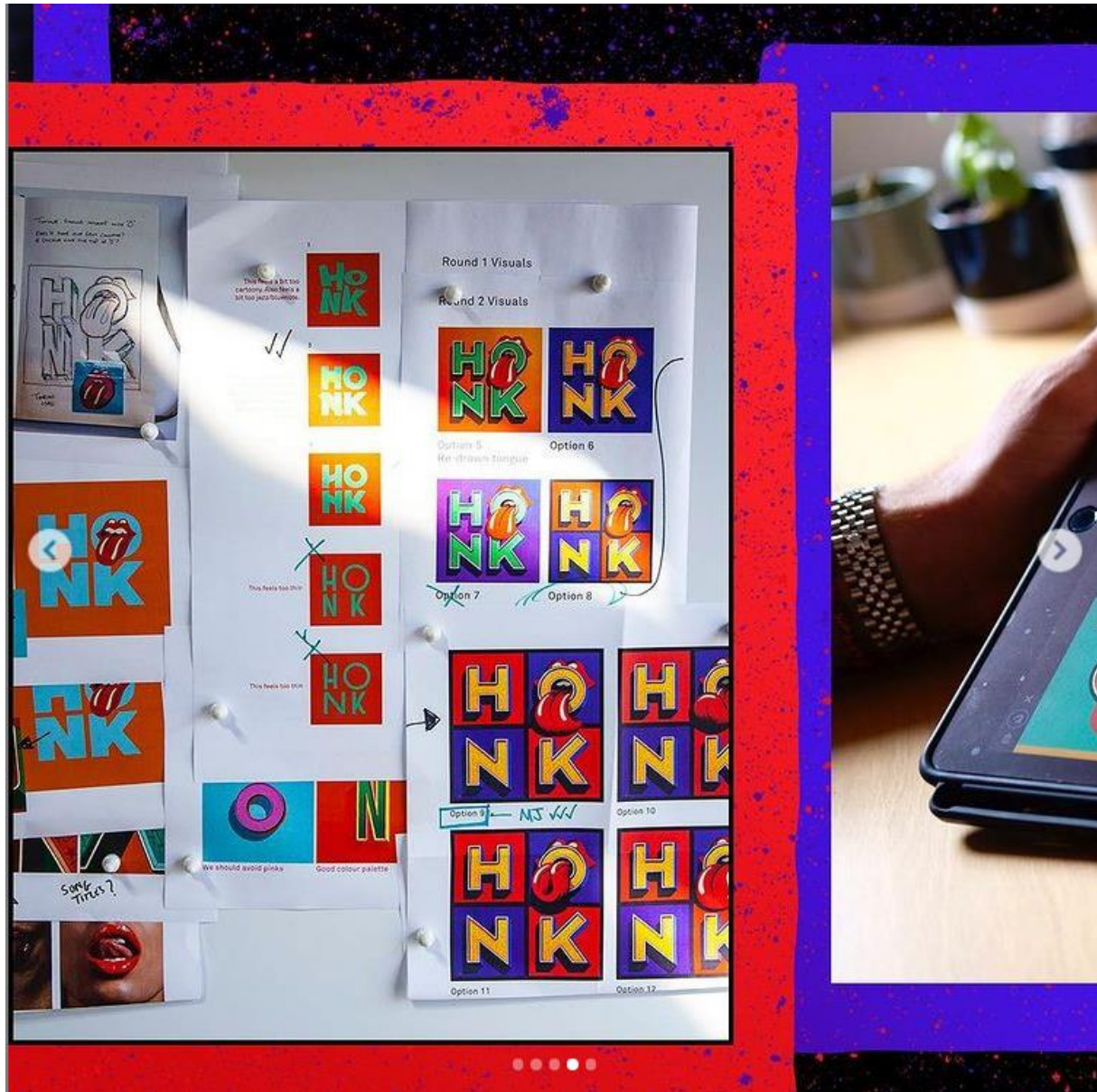


The colorful square had an eerily familiar feel to it, as if we had seen it somewhere before. Was it the block like structure echoing my childhood? Maybe something about the letters? One fan thought Hall's lettering inside the letters was from Ron Wood's painted setlists. Whatever it was gave it a comfortable feel.



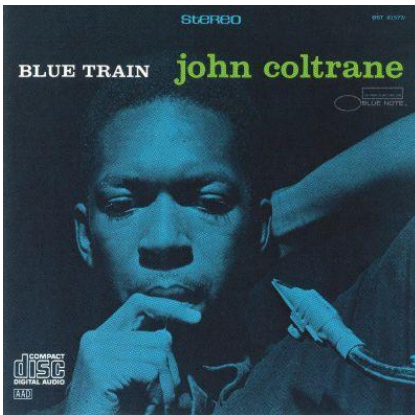
Hall's Instagram posts provide documentation of the cover's design history. "Here's a few (absolutely candid and definitely not staged or reverse engineered) WIP shots of [@therollingstones](#) HONK project that I worked on with [@studiofury](#) 🖋️," said Hall.

Look at the photo. Let's follow his choice of letter style. Look at the green on red letters seen vertically down the middle of the photo.



Asked if he produced different versions of the cover art, Hall said, "Yep, the colours were pretty much decided from the start, but we developed multiple versions of the tongue while we tried to decide how best to have it interact with the O of HONK."

Hall's notes for that the first combination, that eschews the symmetry and careful linear alignments of the other attempts, say "This feels a bit too cartoony. Also feels a bit too



jazz/bluenote". Bluenote was an early jazz record label. Is that what he had in mind? Whatever it was, it was eliminated from consideration.

The two bottom samples are marked, "This feels too thin" and the accompanying x's indicate their elimination.

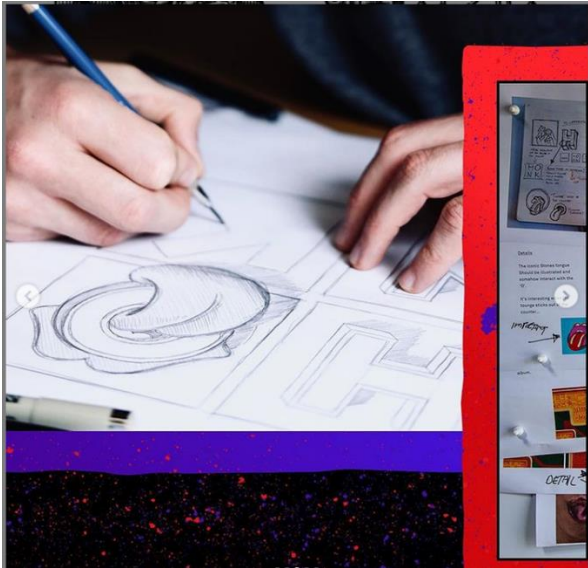
Samples two and three (from the top) look identical and were the clear choice as the checkmarks indicate. It would appear that choosing the print style was the first choice. Beneath the vertical samples we see a lifesaver-like O with the notation "We should avoid pinks," good decision! To the right of the O is an N that is outlined in what may be the letter-fill orange and center-filled with green. This is accompanied by the admonition, "Good color palette."

Beginning at the far left, we can see early versions of the letter arrangement. Some preliminary arrangements of light blue lettering on orange background with the logo passively resting on the O appear. The sketch at the top suggests how the logo was added to the letters. The upper right shows some experimentation with letter and background styles. There is a notation that says "song titles?" perhaps a simple question of how they will be handled or the first notion of including them in the album title letters. At the bottom left is a photo of what appears to be a female mouth and tongue-for inspiration?

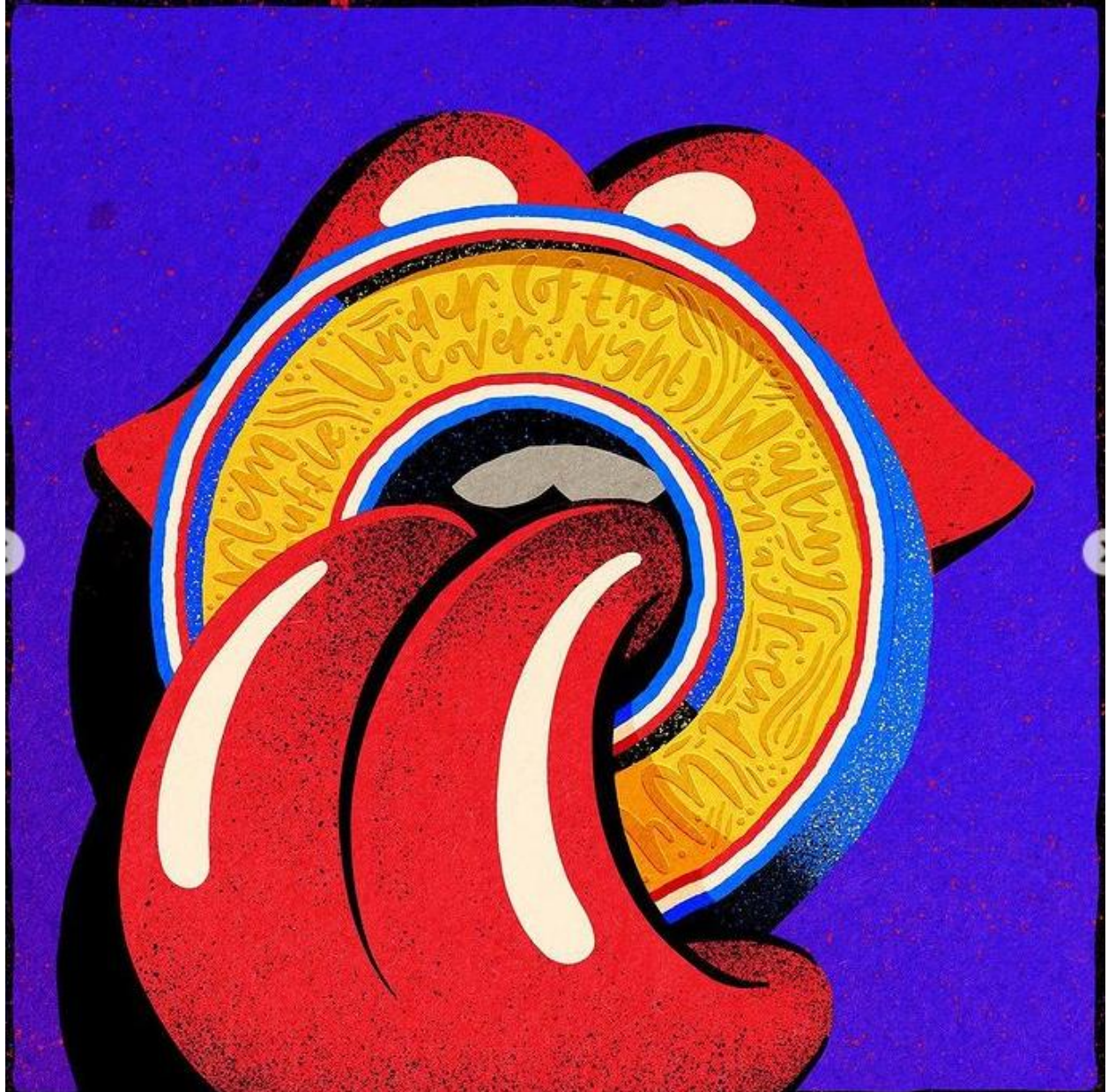
At the far right, under the label, "Round 2 Visuals" we see options 5 through 8. Option 5 has a different tongue. It is not yet the more active curled backward tongue of the album cover. There is an all orange background and all green letters. What is clear is that the arrangement of the letters and their basic style seem to have been determined.

Option 6 is an all purple background with what became the chosen color for the letters. All these samples show the same tongue action. Option 7 is purple with green letters. It has also been eliminated by a green X. Option 8 has the alternating purple and red squares or are they orange, it is hard to see with the way the light seems to wash out some color. What we do see is a winning arrangement, however, as indicated by the parentheses around option 8.

The most fun is found in the lower right where Hall is zeroing in on the final design. The primary variable here is the shape of the tongue. Option 9 is the winner, it was favored by Mick Jagger as evidenced by the MJ with three checkmarks. This is the basis for the design that appears on the album cover. Option 10 has a tongue curling upward. Option 11 shows that classic tongue-curling gene test we have all been subjected to at one time or another. The tongue in Option 12 has more backward bend than the first designs but not the backward curl of the winner.



Hall sketches the concepts then refines them digitally. Notice the K on his tablet has no play list lettering inside. All the lettering was provided by Hall. A close up of the O below, shows the tongue logo and the playlist lettering. Asked if all the lettering was his, Hall said, "Yeah, the lettering for the song titles and the inner sleeves is all hand lettered by myself. I believe Studio Fury may have also created new captions using the lettering I created."



Song titles are found in each of the letters on the album cover. Here are the song titles found in the letters:

In H: Fool to Cry, Hot Stuff, Angie, Mixed Emotions, Brown Sugar, Wild Honey, Miss You, Bitch, Beast of Burden

In O: Harlem Shuffle, Under Cover (of the Night), Waiting on a Friend, Wil(d Horses) only the Wil can be seen

In K: Start Me Up, Rocks Off. It's Only Rock 'n' Roll But I Like It

In N: Rock and a Hard Place, Emotional Rescue, Tumbling Dice, Respectable

Only 19 of the 36 songs, excluding the 10 bonus tracks, are listed in the letters. We asked if Hall or the Stones selected the songs to include in the letters, he said, "I presume the songs were all chosen by the band and the label." He did not decide which songs to insert.

Asked if he was directed to incorporate the logo into the art, Hall said, "Yeah, that was an important factor and the bit that took the most work... Obviously working with The Stones was pretty exciting full stop! But it was also interesting to hear what feedback Mick Jagger had during the process - at one point I was forwarded some of it, which requested that the tongue had 'more energy', so that's what we did!" The finally selected logo image is seen below.



For a *HONK* animation see [Rolling Stones - HONK - Animation — Guy Pittard](#).

Rear Cover, Triple Gatefold and Inner Sleeves

The rear cover used the same four quadrant design found on the front, simply replacing the letters with playlists lettered by Hall. There were multiple LP releases with 2, 3, or 4 discs. The 3 LP set is shown below.



The three inner gatefold pages are shown below. There are two pages of photographs and a page of song credits. The rear side of the fold out is another page of photographs. Many of the photos are familiar to fans, several are likely to be new to most people. The photos were taken

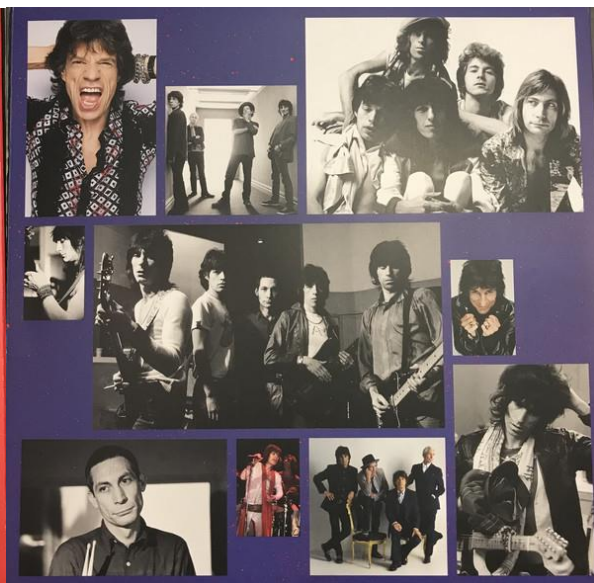
from the work of photographers who worked for the band over the timeframe of the music. These include the following people:

- Aubrey 'Po' Powell
- Christopher Sykes
- Denis O'Regan
- Dimo Safari
- Helmut Newton
- Kevin Westenberg
- Lawrence Kirsch
- Musicfoto
- Mark Seliger
- Rankin
- Steven Klein.



The top three photos below show the opened inner gatefold. The bottom photo would be the third page of the outer gatefold, with the front and rear cover. It is the other side of the song credits.

The inner sleeves are shown at the left. Odd sides are blue even sides are red. All lettering is by Hall.

[illegible]



The four LP set included the bonus ten live songs. This included an extra sleeve seen here. The L includes Under My Thumb, Shine a Light, Beast of Burden (Ed Sheeran). The I contains Wild Horses (Florence Welch) and Dancing With Mr. D. In the V you find Dead Flowers (Brad Paisley) and She's a Rainbow. The E includes Get Off My Cloud, Bitch (Dave Grohl), and Let's Spend the Night Together. That would be all the live songs.

The Artists



Tobias Hall describes himself as a freelance illustrator, letterer, designer and mural artist working out of London. The photographers are shown in

the montage below. Column one top to bottom are Christopher Sykes, Aubrey Powell, Dimo Safari. Column two shows Denis O'Regan and Helmut Newton. John Rankin and Steven Klein make up column three. Column four has Mark Seliger at the top and Kevin Westerberg at the bottom. Lawrence Kirsch is missing. Musicfoto.com is an interactive [concert photo gallery](#) featuring thousands of original classic rock, heavy metal and pop music photos. Rock photography in that era was the bastion of white males, much as the music itself was.



The Vinylverse

A CD jewel box has 27.5 square inches (5.59" x 4.92") of album art per side. An LP has 144 square inches of art per side, that is 5.2 times more than a jewel box. Art is experienced very differently at one-fifth the size. A *HONK* CD owner is not going to see the same art a vinyl owner sees. Booklet inserts are created to show the vinyl cover art that does not fit on the CD 'pages.' It is not just the art that is experienced differently in the vinylverse, it is the album too.

Vinyl is a very structured musical format. By its nature it both requires and limits you to 20-25 minutes per side. Historically, a lot of consideration has gone into determining the running order and what songs go on which side. The four sides of *Exile On Main Street*, provide a great example. An album's structure and order created the album's vibe and character.

When compact discs emerged as the industry standard, artists were pushed to come up with more product, which was put all on one side with the listener easily able to alter the running order with a 'shuffle' or to skip tracks with the push of a skip forward button. The album's "identity" began to be greatly diluted. The musicians' attempts to establish an album's identity, by making the songs sound like a cohesive whole were undermined by technology.

Now we have streaming. Everyone can be a record producer. Songs can be arranged in any order by anyone with a Spotify account. There is no physical structuring other than tradition to

dictate how many songs are released on an album. HONK was released in 1, 2, or 3 CD as well as 2, 3, and 4 LP versions.

HONK focuses on the Stones music after they left London/Decca. Ground zero for this music may well be “Brown Sugar.” The album bounces through the years. A 70s tune may be followed by an 80s tune, 00s tune leads into a 70s tune. Such time travel is rare in this digital world. *HONK* collects music from each of the band’s albums since 1971, including cuts from other compilations. *HONK*’s April 19, 2019 release was originally supposed to coincide with the start of the Stones spring/summer stadium tour. Jagger’s heart health postponed the tour and the album quickly became a reminder of what we were all missing.

One reviewer said, “...it’s surprising to hear how fresh lesser played hits like *Steel Wheels*’ guitar-skittering “Rock and a Hard Place” sounds after “It’s Only Rock ‘n Roll”.” That is not an experience you get in the more structured vinyl world where IORR ends disc one and RAAHP begins disc 2, it is an entirely different world in the vinylverse.

One writer wondered in print whether the compilation has actually become the Stones natural format. He argues that *Tattoo You* was built from music found in the Stones vaults. He may not have known how strong his argument was. In this century, the Stones have released eight albums. Two of them have been studio albums, two have been live albums and the other four have been compilations.

Forty Licks	Compilation	30-Sep-02
Live Licks	Live	1-Nov-04
A Bigger Bang	Studio	5-Sep-05
Rarities 1971-2003	Compilation	22-Nov-05
Shine a Light	Live	1-Apr-08
GRRR!	Compilation	12-Nov-12
Blue & Lonesome	Studio	2-Dec-16
Honk	Compilation	19-Apr-19

As long as there are Completists, there will be a market for compilations, as long as there are compilations there will be album art, and as long as there is album art there will be critics. That is one of the fundamental laws in the vinylverse.



Credits

illustration & lettering - Tobias Hall
design & art direction - Studio Fury

Thanks!

References

[Aubrey "Po" Powell](#)

[Denis O'Regan](#)

[Dimo Safari](#)

[Helmut Newton](#)

info@thelightindarkness.com

[Kevin Westenberg](#)

[Mark Seliger](#)

[Rankin](#)

[Steve Klein](#)

[Studio Fury](#)

Tobias Hall

[Tobias Hall \(@tobiasHall\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

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