

Its Only Rock 'N' Roll IORR

My distinct recollection of this album cover, before beginning this history, was of a zombie apocalypse, before there even was a zombie apocalypse. The Stones were the undead leading legions of undead. The mind plays tricks. The image of Mick Jagger on the cover created my impression of the album cover, a clearly incorrect image, despite the hours spent with this cover in hand those years ago.

The album was originally going to consist of some cover songs with live recordings from the 40 shows they just did on their concluded European tour. New song ideas began taking shape and one of them would give its name to the album that turned out to be all new material save for one cover song.

The story of this album's cover art is the story of the title track, an incredible book of art, Mick Jagger's reaction to that book, a gifted artist named Guy Peellaert, and a creepy Nazi thread.

Title

Is this album *Its only Rockn Roll* as it says on the album cover or is it *It's only Rock'n Roll* as it says on the liner notes of the inner sleeve? Or could it be the more common *It's Only Rock 'N' Roll*? In this story it's going to be *IORR*, problem solved. Let history's sages work that one out. The title is the title because it was too good not to be the title.

IORR is the second Stones album that takes its name from a song in the playlist, *Let It Bleed* being the first. It would be guitarist Mick Taylor's last Rolling Stones album and Ron Wood's first thanks to a 12-string piece of work that survived Keith Richards overdubbing. The songwriting and recording of the album's title track had a connection to Taylor's eventual replacement, Ronnie Wood.

Title Track

In 1973 Wood was a friend of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards while Mick Taylor was ensconced

Mick Taylor said, "I did have a falling out with Mick Jagger over some songs I felt I should have been credited with co-writing on *It's Only Rock 'n Roll*. We were quite close friends and co-operated quite closely on getting that album made. By that time Mick and Keith weren't really working together as a team so I'd spend a lot of time in the studio." The lack of credit was a significant factor in his decision to leave the Stones. Ironically, Wood, his eventual replacement began his Stones career being denied a writer's credit for *IORR*. The liner notes give him an "inspiration" credit.

as the Stones lead guitarist. Wood was busy recording his first solo album, *I've Got My Own Album To Do*, in the studio he had built in his home, The Wick, on Richmond Hill in southwest London. The Glimmer Twins had donated two songs, "Act Together: and "Sure the One You Need" to Wood for his album. Wood said, "Mick gave me a hand on the song. I then helped him out on "It's Only Rock 'N' Roll.'" Thus, the title of the Stones twelfth studio album was born in Ron Wood's studio.

Jagger's inspiration for "It's Only Rock 'N' Roll" is said by some to have been David Bowie's "Rock 'N' Roll Suicide" on *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. The suicide refers to the stage act of T. Rex's Marc Bolan. IORR was recorded in Wood's studio with Jagger and Wood on guitar, Willie Weeks on bass, Kenney Jones on drums, Jagger on lead vocals and Wood and Bowie on backup singing I like it, I like it.

When Keith first heard the song he said, "...it was damn good." He did not care for Ziggy Stardust on vocals, however. "Shit, Mick, what are you doing it with Bowie for? Come on, we've got to steal that motherfucker back. And we did, without too much difficulty. Just the title by itself was so beautifully simple, even if it hadn't been a great song in its own right. I mean come on, it's only rock and roll but I like it."

Richards then proceeded to put his fingerprints all over the song. He told Woods, I took the precaution of removing your guitar parts. The Stones overdubbed the guitars and backing vocals, leaving Wood's 12-string in the mix. IORR was released as a single three months before the album was released.

Its only rock and roll and the Rolling Stones were rock gods, regardless of what you or anyone else thought about the album's music.

Rock Dreams

Belgian artist Guy Peellaert teamed up with author Nik Cohn to create *Rock Dreams*, a fantasy tribute to rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues. Through surreal texts and images, Cohn and Peellaert paint an imaginary world where the great gods of mid-century popular music appear in their own settings. If you have not seen this book, do yourself a favor and at least thumb through it.

When Jagger met Peellaert in Germany in 1973 he asked, "Whose coffin is that?" Peellaert said "I don't know, Mick," and later added, "He knew very well it was supposed to be Brian Jones."



Was Peellaert presciently anticipating Richards' movie career?

Peellaert has an amazing gift for recreating the likenesses of his rock and roll heroes while putting them in realistic situations that are amazing for their fantasized simplicity and complexity. For example, Lennon, Dylan, Jagger and Elvis sit at the counter of a greasy-spoon cafe on the book's cover, four small-town buddies having a coffee and chewing the fat. Rock and roll fantasy. In *Rock Dreams* the Stones are featured in several pictures, all with strong overtones of baroque decadence.

Peellaert found the Stones the most louche band of all. *Rock Dreams* has them holding court at the Ad Lib club, recreating the food fight at the launch of *Beggars Banquet*, he depicts Jagger and Richards as pirates dancing on a coffin, and most infamously he portrayed them in Gestapo uniforms surrounded by naked pre-pubescent girls. Bill Wyman is, ironically, missing from this painting. Mick Jagger's Nazi uniform hangs in a closet as he stands naked but for a garter belt and stockings. Brian Jones, creepily, touches a child, as Keith Richards properly drinks tea as a naked child pornographically rides his leg. Charlie Watts appears to accompany a piano playing naked girl on his violin as a fourth naked girl child leans against his leg.

Peellaert may have been influenced in this depiction by an earlier portrait of Brian Jones in a Nazi uniform. One interpretation of this particular piece is that it is a powerful statement of how one artist perceived rebellion and decadence run amok. Jagger among other celebrities was fascinated by Peellaert's work and this led to him being invited to design the cover for *IORR*. Years later, Peellaert was asked, "How did Jagger feel about being portrayed as a corseted, super-realistic drag queen and a Nazi with a kink for pre-pubescent girls?" "He liked it ... of course," said Peellaert, with a sly smile.



Munich

The Stones, quite humanly, have been influenced by the atmosphere and culture of the places



in which they recorded. The warm Jamaican vibes brought a bit of voodoo to Goats Head Soup. The voodoo vibe of Barbados is reflected in Voodoo Lounge. The Rolling Stones were recording *IORR* in Munich in 1973. This was the easy going artsy Bavarian city where Hitler rose to fame 50 years earlier. Munich's cold urban surroundings and recent history affected the new work-in-progress quite differently than the voodoo vibes of the Caribbean.

While they were working in Munich, Jagger was moved to invite the Belgian graphic artist Peellaert to the band's recording sessions to get a taste for their music and conceptualize the artwork for their new album. In addition to a 1966 shopping spree at Hollywood Military Hobbies in Los Angeles where some of the band bought military clothes and effects (mostly Nazi), there were

Jones' flirtation with Nazi regalia, Peellaert's depiction of the Stones as Nazis, the Stones location in Munich, Richards' fascination with Hitler's mesmeric stage presence and uncanny control over immense crowds—something a rock star could relate to. Is it any wonder, then, that Reich-ish themes may have slipped consciously or unconsciously into Peellaert's thoughts? The Bettmann Archive photograph is eerily close to the *IORR* cover.

Peellaert's 1973 book *Rock Dreams* had depicted the Stones as sadomasochistic child-molesting Nazis. For their album cover, Peellaert would paint them as immortal "rock deities" or triumphant gods descending a temple staircase, feted by hundreds of worshipping, diaphanously clad, petal-strewing handmaidens.

Peellaert's Process

Guy Peellaert was a painter, illustrator, graphic artist and photographer. He happily played with all of these roles to create Pop Art with a dark side. *Elle* magazine called him "the Michelangelo of Pop" in 1974. Undoubtedly, he was hugely influential and collectable and remained in great demand as an artist. Peellaert and Jagger got along famously, even after he broke his exclusivity clause with the Stones.

Peellaert always worked from photographic material, that required a treasure trove of photographic material. He collected thousands of photographs of rock personalities, celebrities' faces, body parts, backgrounds, objects and other items of potential interest. In time this would grow into an archive of staggering size. He then began imagining vignettes and tableaus for the

characters, which not only had to convey the essence of their music and mythical personalities but also recall a situation he himself had experienced.

His next step involved a rough sketch of the future composition, the equivalent of storyboarding a one-image movie. This might be followed by painted backgrounds or settings in some cases. That was followed by a time-consuming picture research phase. Peellaert and several assistants would check their archived materials and then source all kinds of photographic material to be used as the composition's building blocks. Most photos came from magazines and books that Peellaert assembled into his own visual database during the Pop period. Additional photos were obtained from picture agencies and the rest were shot directly by Peellaert using a Polaroid. He would take Polaroids of friends or himself to provide bodies for the pictures.

A single photomontage might involve dozens of such elements used to construct the montage desired. This might include substituted heads on the posed bodies of his friends. Each had to be printed individually at the exact scale required by the final composition. When the montage was completed, the dozens of composite layers had to be photographed. The final result would be printed on a special photo paper to which Peellaert could apply color. This was done mainly through airbrush painting and small acrylic flourishes locally to emphasize certain effects, the white sheen on some of the faces of IORR provide an example.

An excellent example of this technique as applied for IORR can be seen below. There are 116 females and 5 Rolling Stones. Several faces are repeatedly used. An additional person has been added to the vestibule (32 instead of 31 seen here) in the final album cover, which has 117 females on it. Let all the obsessives among us check that while the normies move along. The composition below would be photographed, printed on special paper then painted.



The Other Cover

Jagger had commissioned Peellaert to work “exclusively” on the cover for *IORR* due to be released in October 1974. Jagger showed his friend, David Bowie, some of Peellaert’s work and he told him about the commission. Bowie was a friend, a peer and a rival to Jagger and at the time he had an ever-deepening fixation with the Stones. When he heard about the commission, he went behind Jagger’s back and talked the artist into also working on his cover. Bowie’s own album *Diamond Dogs* was due out in June and he had an idea for a cover featuring him as half-man half-dog.

Bowie invited Peellaert to breakfast and then persuaded him to attend a session with photographer Terry O’Neill after which Bowie asked him to create a “Rock Dreams” cover for *Diamond Dogs*. Peellaert was uncomfortable and embarrassed, he didn’t want to betray Jagger,



with whom he felt he had created a real connection. On the other hand, he found Bowie's creative idea too interesting to refuse.



Peellaert had not heard from Jagger for some time and he believed it was possible that the Rolling Stones project would not materialize so he accepted the commission in violation of his exclusivity arrangement. He completed the work on 7 March 1974. A few covers were produced with the original design then RCA had the dog's genitals airbrushed out for all subsequent covers. Peellaert continued to get along well with Jagger, even after the artist broke his promise.



The transition from rough sketch through composition and final product for *Diamond Dogs* provides a nice visual summary of the artist's process. It could have soured the deal for *IORR* but the artist's relationship with Jagger prevented that from happening..

The IORR Cover

Let us see how writers have described the cover of *IORR*. In *Rolling Stone Magazine* Turner said of the Stones, "This time they appear in various stages of dishevelment, descending a stone staircase lined by a horde of garlanded maidens, apparent victims of a time warp – the Rolling Stones arriving in ancient Rome...It's something you can really get into, because at first it just looks as though all of those women are adoring the Rolling Stones, but then you notice that the people on the top left are into these chicks on the right and there are other chicks who're completely into a different bag, the ones who've seen it all. I mean, I see Bill Wyman in drag all over the place."

Norman, in his book, said Peellaert, "depicted the Rolling Stones walking through what seemed to be a parliament chamber full of pre-Raphaelite young women and little girls, seemingly immune to their outstretched bare arms.

Davis, in his book, said, "Peellaert painted them as triumphant gods descending from a classical temple, feted by hundreds of diaphanous, petal-strewing handmaidens."



Margotin and Guesdon said, "The artist produced an illustration in the same spirit as those that had made *Rock Dreams* so successful. It depicts the five Stones in the guise of the Olympic deities, descending the red carpeted steps of a colonnaded temple to the acclaim of a crowd of young women clad in Roman togas who are giving the Roman salute. In the foreground is a group of young girls joining hands in a child's dance."

An unidentified author said, "This album caught my eye because it looks as if it came right out of an art gallery. The album depicts the band walking down a red carpeted staircase, surrounded with women holding bouquets of flowers."

<https://classicwind.wordpress.com/2012/04/05/aprils-awesome-album-artwork-part-4-its-only-rock-n-roll-by-the-rolling-stones/>

The British Music magazine NME chose the cover as the best record cover of 1974. A closer look begins with the eerie similarity to the Hitler led Nazi gathering seen before and reproduced below in a different context.



Some points of similarity include five columns in each, a vestibule, carpeted stairway, crowds to the left and right and following the supreme leader, Roman salutes, and an apparent status hierarchy among the leaders of the parade down the stairway.

In an effort to learn the occasion of the Bettmann Archive photo seen earlier or to find other similar photos a Google image search said the closest match they could find to this photo was the cover of IORR. Meanwhile, the Estate of Guy Peellaert has confirmed this connection saying, "...this image was indeed the main reference for the front cover, albeit in a different



context. Peellaert used another record sleeve, *Hitler's Inferno* [that image is shown above left]. This was a nod to an iconic portrait of the Rolling Stones from *Rock Dreams*, in which they are pictured as Nazi officers holding court with prepubescent girls (this was itself a tongue-in-cheek nod to Their Satanic Majesties Request and the infamous pictures of Brian Jones posing in a

Nazi uniform)."

In the finished cover it is dusk. The moon is full and dark clouds horizontally streak the sky. There are 117 women in the temple, all of them are white. The adult women wear floor length layered gowns of diaphanous material, lots of ruffles and frills and flounces. Forty-one women have extended at least one arm in Roman salute to the dignitaries.

The Roman salute is a gesture in which the arm is fully extended, facing forward, with palm down and fingers touching. In some versions, the arm is raised upward at an angle; in others, it is held out parallel to the ground. In contemporary times, the former is widely considered a symbol of fascism that is commonly perceived to be based on a custom in ancient Rome. It is associated with Nazi Germany.

There are 32 women standing in the vestibule, there are 22 women in the center stairway, there are 8 in each of the two wing boxes, with 19 on the left side of the stairway and 17 on the right side of the stairway. Six young maidens are sitting front left and 5 younger girls are standing front right.

Flowers are plentiful. There are six bouquets in the center stair, one in the vestibule, and two on the right side of the stair. Fifteen women on the left have garlands in their hair, 8 in the center stair, 12 on the right side, 6 in the right wing box, and 3 in the left wing

box. Feet are generally not visible. The right front group of children are barefooted as is one woman in the left front. Three others women can be seen wearing shoes. Only the women in the wing boxes have long tresses. The same faces are repeated on several women.

Mick Jagger leads the Stones. He is on the floor in a cream-colored suit. His arms swing loosely by his sides as he appears to be doing the zombie stagger. To the viewers right of Jagger we see Keith Richards standing on the first step, arms straight down by his sides. He wears an ill-fitting suit with an unbuttoned pucker in his jacket. Left of Jagger, we see Charlie Watts on steps 2 and 3 walking down the stairway with his arms apparently behind his back. Watts is in formal wear with scarf, boutonniere and tie. To the far right is Bill Wyman standing on the 3rd and 4th steps, his hands in his jacket pockets wearing a vest and turtle neck. Directly behind Jagger is Mick Taylor on about step 6, wearing a hood and scarf with a jacket. There are 14 red carpeted steps and five columns. It could well be the first zombie apocalypse.

The Back Cover

The Peellaert Estate identified the site of the album cover concept as the Lincoln Memorial. The original version of the rear cover was the same as the front but with the crowd gone and only a single piece of girl's undergarment remaining on the stairs, a detail that was censored and that never made it onto the final back sleeve.

This could be dawn the day after the Stones descended the stair. The pink and creamy sky is lighter, a new day is dawning. The red carpet is gone, the temple has been vandalized by spray painters. This is where the album 's title appears on the wall of the vestibule.



There is a satanic tinge to the graffiti seen in the devil's tail endings on the Y, N, and L of the title graffiti. The musical artists name appears on the right wing box. It no longer takes The



Rolling Stones to identify the band, Stones says it all. The S shares the same devil's tail ending. In the lower left corner is the tongue and lips logo that first appeared on *Sticky Fingers*. The columns look slightly different from the front cover, the perspective on the

fluting pattern has changed in rather subtle ways



The Peellaert Estate went on to say, "The original artwork for IORR, which is an elaborate photomontage painted with airbrush paint and acrylic on paper in the same technique developed by Guy Peellaert in his Rock Dreams series of 1970-1973, was Peellaert's idea and would have been approved by The Rolling Stones upon submission of a rough draft. It is not known to what extent a back-and-forth might have occurred subsequently, resulting in the final image."



The Inner Sleeve

The black and white inner sleeve looks like a piece of paper that has recently been unrolled from a scroll. It appears to be pasted to a concrete surface, perhaps part of the temple depicted on the outer cover. As noted at the outset, the title is written differently on the cover than on the inner sleeve. Two apostrophes have been added. One to It's and one to the 'n. The sleeve includes the play list and the cast in order of appearance in that playlist. Additional musicians who contributed to the Song IORR are listed. It is here that Ron Wood, not yet but soon to be a Stone, gets his inspiration credit. This is followed by production credits, punctuated by a black tongue and lips logo.

It's only Rock'n Roll

Side 1

1. If you can't rock me 3:47
2. Ain't too proud to beg 3:32
3. It's only Rock'n Roll (But I like it) 5:08
4. Till the next goodbye 4:39
5. Time waits for no one 6:31

Side 2

6. Luxury 5:02
7. Dance little sister 4:12
8. If you really want to be my friend 6:17
9. Short and curlyies 9:44
10. Fingerprint file 6:41

Cast in order of appearance:

Keith Richards Guita, Vocal, Bas

Mick Taylor Guita, Vocal, Synthesizer, Conga, Bas

Charlie Watts Drums

Mick Jagger Vocals, Guita

Bill Wyman Bas, Synthesizer

Billy Preston Piano, Clavinet on tracks 1, 2, 10

Nicky Hopkins Piano on tracks 4, 5, 6, 8, 10

Ian Stewart Piano on tracks 3, 7, 9

Ray Cooper Percussion

Blue Magic Vocal backing on 'If you really want to be my friend'

Charlie Jolly Salsa on track 10

Ed Leach Cowbell on track 2

Additional musicians on 'It's only Rock'n Roll'

Kenny Jones, Willy Weeks, inspiration for Ronnie Wood

Recording Engineer: Andy Johns and Keith Harwood

Overdub Engineer: George Olmstead

Assistant Engineer: Tapani Tapanainen/Rod Thier

Howard Kilgour/Mac Munich

Mixing Engineer: Keith Harwood

Trappist Floor raised by Glyn Johns

Recorded at Musicland Studios, München, W. Germany

Produced by The Glimmer Twins

Songs written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, except

'Ain't too proud to beg' by Norman Whitfield & Eddie Holland

All songs published by Tamla Music International - 1974

'Ain't too proud to beg' published by Jobete Music Inc.

Album designed and prepared by Guy Pedlent

Bill Preston by courtesy of A & M Records

Blue Magic by courtesy of Atlantic Recording Corporation



Turn the inner sleeve over and you will find photos of Ian Stewart who played Piano on 3 tracks, Nicky Hopkins who played piano on 5 more tracks, and Billy Preston who played piano or clavinet on 3 tracks. Recording engineers, Keith Harwood and Andy Johns are also featured. These Photos are also affixed to the same concrete wall. No photography credit has been provided or found.



Nazis, Really?

If Brian Jones had not worn the Nazi uniform that inspired Peellaert's picture of the SS Stones then Jagger would not have become enamored of this artist who was invited to Munich to watch the Stones record. Without the Nazi music album Peellaert may not have been inspired to paint the cover we now know to be IORR. That is far from a reason to thank the Nazis but it is a rather unexpected turn of events. Grab a copy of *Rock Dreams*.

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