

The Rolling Stones

How Does This All Work?

Before rock and roll changed everything about the industry, sound studios used to find songs for artists and sometimes they found artists for songs. They handled everything for all but the biggest stars-song selection, arrangement, mixing, titles, packaging, all of it. This is the world the 20-something Stones and their 19-year old manager stepped into in 1964. The Stones battles with Decca Records would be epic over the duration of the contract their young manager negotiated for them. They seemed to be constantly breaking ground with their covers in the 60s and 70s. Never short of self-belief, even when it was provided by an inexperienced teenage manager, those battles began right out of the starting gate with the Stones untitled debut album.

The story of the Stones first album cover is the story of a young man's bold ideas and Nicholas (Nicky) Wright's modest photographs. A writer on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of release of this album said, "So while we should be celebrating The Rolling Stones' first album for "Route 66," "I'm A King Bee," "Tell Me" and all the rest; telling tales of Phil Spector shaking maracas while uptight old Gene Pitney looned about the place like Bez, its greatest legacy to rock'n'roll came courtesy of the wrapper it came in." That was the beginning of the revolution that became a way of life.

The Untitled

There were 642 days between the Rolling Stones July 12, 1962 first performance at the

Marquee Club in London and the release of their first album on April 17, 1964. Naming your first album must be a momentous occasion. The Stones never named their first album, their manager took care of that. He gave it no title at all. Although the Rolling Stones first album is eponymously called *The Rolling Stones*, it, in fact, had no title.

Advance orders for the Stones first album exceeded 100,000 compared to 6,000 for the titled and band-named debut of The Beatles debut album. The Stones debut album climbed to no. 1 on UK charts besting and dethroning With The Beatles.



Let Andrew Loog Oldham explain. "I did not want the Stones LP to have some inappropriate title. My attitude was "Everyone knows who they are, that's why we don't need their name on the cover." The idea came to me one night and was a permanent must-have implant by the next morning. The Rolling Stones LP would have no title and no name, just their moody mugs staring back outatcha." Oldham knew the Rolling Stones were better than just another pop group. To accentuate this fact their debut album would come housed in a sleeve

that redefined total self-belief, impudent insubordination and unprecedented arrogance, no title, no band name.

The album was recorded in five days between 3 January and 25 February at Regent Sound Studios, 4 Denmark Street, in London. Studio time was expensive, Bill Wyman said, "The band had to record more or less live in the studio, so what was on the record was basically our act, which we played on the ballroom and club circuits. It was really just the show we did on stage, recorded in one take-as it should be!" Oldham held the tapes from the session.

Decca Records balked at Oldham's suggestion of no title or group name on the album but Oldham held the tapes. Decca balked in the press, so did Oldham who still held the tapes.



Regent Sounds Studio circa 2019

Advance orders for the album continued to go up, in fact they doubled to over 100,000 during this standoff. The brash young Oldham stood his ground and Bill Townsley at Decca relented and the group's first LP went out, unrelenting, unforgiven and untitled.



Recording session for first album at Regent Sound Studios

No doubt Oldham would have removed the Decca emblem had he been able to do so. This simple inspiration has been called an act of extreme Oldham hubris. In defiance of Decca Records entire marketing department he insisted that the cover showed neither name nor title. It would be just a glossy picture of the five standing sideways with heavily shadowed unsmiling, scowling faces turned to the camera. No rock group is believed to have ever done that before. It was regarded by most as equal to commercial suicide. Ian Fortnam said, "In their vainglorious, quintessentially British arrogance The Rolling Stones insist, get their way and go on to spend the next 50 years imperiously traversing the globe under the banner of 'The Greatest Rock 'N' Roll Band in The World'... a description for which they even own the copyright." It's a Stones thing, it's a way of life.

Decca, fans and others had to call the album something and The Rolling Stones Unnamed Album was a bit awkward. The reverse side of the album shouted the band's name in the largest font imaginable and so the album was simply referred to as *The Rolling Stones*. But now you are well enough informed to know that anyone who refers to it as the eponymous album is sorely misinformed.

Two Albums

From the outset, Decca and its United States subsidiary, London Records, each released its own version of a Stones album. The albums could vary by cover art, title, track listing or any combination of these differences. This first album used the same cover art photo. The UK

version had no title, the US version did. The track listings varied for a single song, "Not Fade Away" replaced "I Need You Baby" (better known as Mona) on the US version and the sequence of side one songs differed as well.

The Stones were established and had a following in the United Kingdom, so Oldham's bold gambit was inspired in the UK but too risky for the US. To herald the group's arrival in the US the album's title was amended by Decca's American subsidiary, London Records, who retitled (or did they simply title it?) the album *England's Newest Hitmakers*. Most significantly they added the band name to the cover.

Andrew Who?

One cannot tell the story of the first Stones album cover without some of the story of Andrew Loog Oldham. Oldham would seem to have been a delightful mix of visionary, go-getter, flim-flam artist and hustler. In April 1963 Oldham saw the Rolling Stones perform and by his own admission fell in love. The 19-year old Oldham saw potential in the group as the "anti-Beatles". He acquired Eric Easton as a seasoned business partner and took over management of the Stones. Oldham and Easton negotiated a recording contract for the Stones that was very favorable to themselves. Instead of having the Stones sign directly with Decca they set up a company, Impact Sound, which retained ownership of the group's master tapes. These were then leased to Decca. This was instrumental in Oldham's success in having the Stones first album untitled. He held the tapes. Oldham showed the Stones what they could be and they became it.



Charlie Watts, Andrew Loog Oldham, Brian Jones, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, and Bill Wyman

Among the visionary things he did for the Stones was to limit Ian Stewart's role to studio-only play, assuring the Stones remained a five-man group of slender young men. He brought Beatles John Lennon and Paul McCartney to the recording studio. This led to their song "I Wanna Be Your Man" becoming the Rolling Stones' second single and inspiring the Stones to write their

own music. Oldham encouraged Jagger and Richard(s) to start writing their own songs. He promoted the Stones "bad boy" image in contrast to the Beatles. Wyman said, Oldham's creativity reached new heights with the band's first album, heights he was never able to scale again. His belief in himself and the band prompted the bold stroke of creating a cover with no name, just a photograph. It was unheard of.

Oldham produced all Rolling Stones recordings from 1963 until late 1967 despite his previous lack of experience as a producer. The Rolling Stones' website says "Accounts regarding the value of his musical input to the Stones recordings vary, from negligible to absolute zero". What Oldham did do is see the Stones' potential and he kept them moving forward.

The Album Covers

Unusually for records of the time, the album cover featured a photograph of the band, taken by Nicholas Wright, with nothing more than Decca's name printed on the front. Oldham's concept



was no doubt intended to incite the curiosity of new listeners and leave a stronger visual impact, relative to the styling of almost all other album covers of the era.

The fledgling Stones had already cultivated a highly visual image as 'rebels.' Teens were asked, "Would You Let Your Sister Go with a Rolling Stone?" Parents across the UK feared this possibility, which perhaps had the unintended consequence of increasing the perceived cleaner-cut allure of the Beatles whose mop-topped demeanor quickly became almost cuddly by comparison. Oldham knew this only too well and he traded on it in the risky move of leaving the band's name off the front cover of the album entirely. This resulted in all the attention being focused on the picture. It was a simple studio shot band photo as was the norm, but it was a much darker example of that form. The band stood side on looking over their shoulders at the holder of the album in a 'who are you?' surly fashion.



At a time when marketing was king in terms of album design and most LPs still featured the tracks on the front as well as the band name and title, this was unheard of. Oldham said at first the Stones, who had been away “on those hysteria-swamped one-night stands all over the country, were as concerned as Decca over my album design.” He describes Jagger and Richard as eventually loving the idea and pushing him on. His business partner Easton and Wyman were worried that he was going too far and his antics may deplete sales and perhaps be a career ending move rather than a career building move. Watts is described as smiling in time to the pedal of his life while Brian “took it hard and angst’d on it.” The decision paid off spectacularly as the album hit the number 1 spot in the UK charts the week it was released nudging the Beatles second album out of first place. It remained number 1 for 12 weeks and spent 67 weeks total in the UK charts.

Let’s look at the photo. Mick Jagger comes first. He is tieless and holds his hands in the fig leaf position, pouting patiently as he awaits his moment. Dapper Charlie Watts comes next wearing a nearly perpetual look of insubordination. Broody Bill Wyman, also tieless in a leather jacket, was squeezed into the middle position and is followed by a barely recognizable, shadowy Keith Richard, enfant terrible of the Stones. Brian appears slightly closer to the camera and is petulantly displaying a sense of entitlement as he stands at the back of the group and out of line. He is the only one in their old stage uniform of leather waistcoat and shirtsleeves rather than the varicolored suits favored by the others for this photo. The anti-Beatles were born.

Fortnam says, Nicholas Wright’s portrait captures a sullen quintet who can’t even be bothered to smile. In 1964, everybody smiled on their album cover, but The Rolling Stones - scowling out of the shadows - are way too cool for any of that tired, old show-business bullshit.

“The Stones first LP outing, dressed and sold to no. 1 in the UK—via its urgent accuracy and my immaculate no-name imagery—had been repackaged behind my back by London Records and given a title, *England’s Newest Hitmakers*, putting the event lower on the graphics pole than a Freddie & the Dreamers cover. We were pissed.” A. L. Oldham

The cover works in England. In the US, the band had no such established image. So London Records made sure the American release contained not only the band name but also the cringe-inducing tagline “England’s Newest Hit Makers.” Absent an official title, this has gone on to become the defacto name of the first album in the US.

Oldham reports that London Records reputedly invested \$85,000 in the Stones. They got a double page advert in Billboard but the new album took a back seat to the first US tour by the Stones. Oldham hated the ad

as much as the tacky title that London had put over the top of the Stones debut UK LP. The ad was rush released in the US for the tour. Oldham said, “I was angry but what could I do? I couldn’t even get through to London Records on the telephone.”

Little is known about the actual details of the photo shoot. Wright took individual portraits of the band members and a number of group shots. A few of these shots are seen below.

Wright was born and raised in Hampshire, England. His first love was always big U.S. cars and he is known for his published articles and photo features in magazines like *High Performance Mopar*, *Car Collector*, and *Special Interest Autos*. Before he succeeded in making a living photographing and writing about automobiles, he wrote over 20 books on cars, he became well known in Great Britain for his excellent photography of rock groups including The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Animals, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, The Beach Boys, the Everley Brothers, Fats Domino, The Byrds, The Monkees, Ray Charles, and Duke Ellington to mention some of the more notable performers he photographed. His album cover work included the Moody Blues *Go Now* and *The Magnificent Moodles*, Manfred Mann's *Mann Made*, the Animals *Animal Tracks*, *Yes* by *Yes*, as well as The Rolling Stones.

Wright first visited the United States in the 60's when he was commissioned to travel with The Rolling Stones American tour. This is when he decided he would one day return to America, where he later lived and worked, to photograph the American automobiles he so loved. Wright died on January 17, 2000. The winter he died, he headed back to England to make peace with his mother and have a reunion with the Stones. He had a cold when he left. He had had a falling out with his mother because she tossed boxes of his pictures he had left with her. He made peace with his mother, met the Stones, then ended up with pneumonia in the hospital and died. Little could be learned of Wright's work with the Stones.



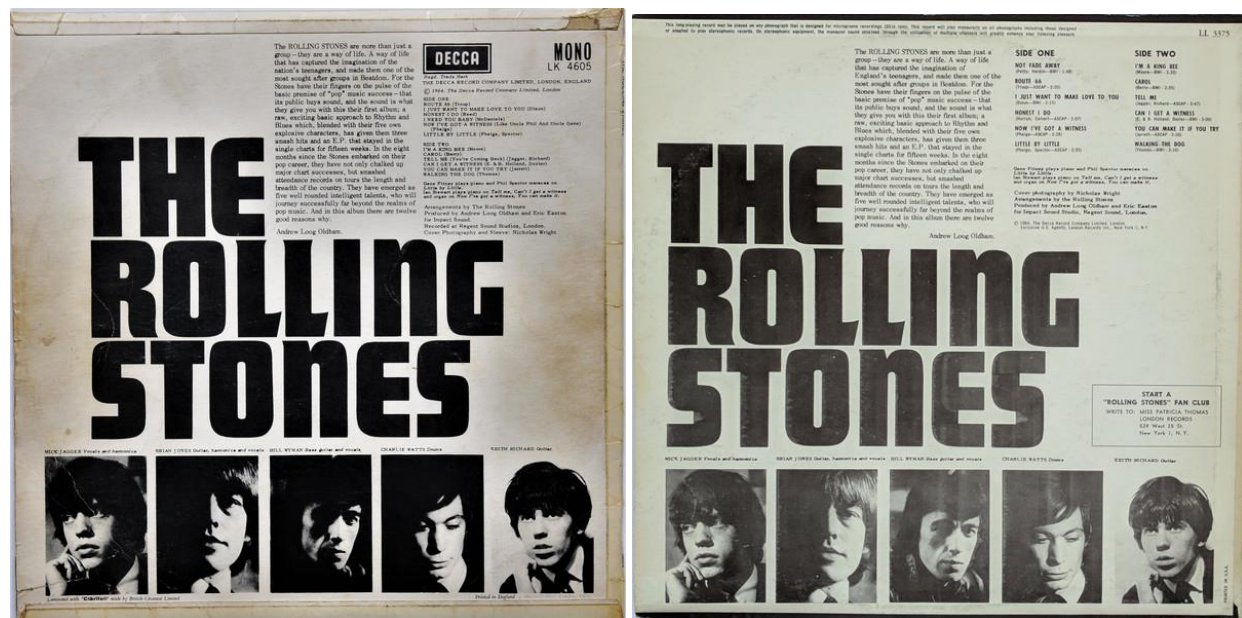
London ad and Wright photos

Back Cover

The back cover (Decca left, London right) probably looks more like a traditional front cover than the actual front cover. Even in England the rear of the album was emblazoned with the band name in the biggest possible font. This may be why people have tended to call this an eponymous album (I believe that I have now set a record for using “eponymous” in a short paper). Captioned photos of the five members are also found on the rear of both covers.

After the Rolling Stones signed to Decca Records in 1963, their band manager, Oldham, dropped the s from Richards' surname, believing that "Keith Richard," in his words, "looked more pop".

Wright's portraits begin (left to right) with Mick Jagger Vocals and harmonica. Brian Jones Guitar, harmonica and vocals, Bill Wyman Bass guitar and vocals, Charlie Watts Drums, and Keith Richard Guitar. Sleeve notes by Oldham (See Oldham's Opus below) are featured alongside the track listing and credits. Gene Pitney plays piano and Phil Spector maracas on “Little by Little” Ian Stewart plays piano on “Tell Me”, “Can I Get a Witness”, and organ on “Now I've Got A Witness” and “You Can Make It.”



Another clear distinction between the two versions is the US release includes a notice just above the photo of Keith Richard that says: Start a “Rolling Stones” Fan Club. Write to” Miss Patricia Thomas, London Records, 539 West 25 St., New York 1, N. Y. This was in the days of zones, three years before zipcodes were implemented. An inquiry has been recently mailed, a response is not expected. London records was a very profitable sideline for Decca CEO Sir Edward Lewis.

Andrew's Opus

Oldham says the real title of the album was found in the opening line of his sleeve notes, where he more than made up for his lack of words on the front cover. "The ROLLING STONES are more than just a group-they are a way of life." These are words that have resonated with virtually all hardcore fans, many authors who have written about the Stones as well as the Stones themselves. His notes go on to say:

"...A way of life that has captured the imagination of England's teenagers, and made them one of the most sought after groups in Beatdom. For the Stones have their fingers on the pulse of the basic premise of "pop" music success-that its public buys sound, and the sound is what they give you with this first album; a raw, exciting basic approach to Rhythm and Blues which, blended with their five own explosive characters, has given them three smash hits and an E.P. that stayed in the single charts for fifteen weeks. In the eight months since the Stones embarked on their pop career, they have not only chalked up major chart successes, but smashed attendance records on tours the length and breadth of the country. They have emerged as five well rounded intelligent talents, who will journey successfully far beyond the realms of pop music. And in this album there are twelve good reasons why."

Wyman quotes Oldham as saying, "Pop music is sex and you have to hit them in the face with it." The album was a blast of rhythm and blues energy a stark contrast to Beatles love songs. Oldham may have contributed near zero to the Stones music but he recognized the raw blues energy that spilled forth in this first effort. Bluesmen achieved power by including the particulars of their own lives. Pop writers lingered on the universals of love and heartache. Bluesmen named names, clubs, desires, and certain women in certain towns. This, he understood.

Wyman said Oldham's opus opener was a, "... brilliant quote which encapsulated the philosophy of the band so succinctly and was absolutely true by now, whichever side of the fence you sat. No title and no words, the first time this had been done."

Tracklists

The albums had different tracklists that were arranged differently on the albums and displayed differently on the covers.

UK Release April 16, 1964		US Release May 30, 1964	
Side 1	Side 2	Side 1	Side 2
Route 66	I'm A King Bee	Not Fade Away 1:48	I'm A King Bee 2:33
I Just Want To Make Love To You	Carol	Route 66 2:20	Carol 2:35
Honest I Do	Tell Me	I Just Want To Make Love To You 2:15	Tell Me 3:47
I Need You Baby	Can I get A Witness	Honest I Do 2:07	Can I get A Witness 3:00

Now I've Got A Witness	You Can Make It If You Try	Now I've Got A Witness 2:28	You Can Make It If You Try 2:10
Little By Little	Walking the Dog	Little By Little 2:35	Walking the Dog 3:10

Their debut album includes one original song by the fledgling writing team of Jagger and Richard, the variably timed "Tell Me." There are also two numbers attributed to (Nanker) Phelge - a pseudonym the band used for group compositions from 1963 to 1965. These were "Now I've Got a Witness" and "Little By Little."

Mini-Mystery

How long is your "Tell Me" version? Discogs (<https://www.discogs.com/The-Rolling-Stones-The-Rolling-Stones/master/9715>) and other sources say the first cut of the album contains a version that runs for 2:52 and all subsequent versions run for 4:06, yet the author's version shown above runs for 3:47.

Poster Insert

All early printings of *England's Newest Hitmakers* included a poster insert of Wright's cover photograph, seen below.



Inner Sleeve

The inner sleeve was a generic sleeve, the one below is the author's US version of *England's Newest Hitmakers*. The London ffr logo with an ear at the end of the r is found in the upper right corner of the front cover. Now we venture into hallowed ground better understood by others. FFRR stands for full frequency range recording. The explanation of it found on the sleeve is: "The greatest single advance in sound reproduction since the invention of the phonograph was ffrr (full frequency range recording), introduced on 78 rpm discs

shortly after World War II. For the first time, the full frequency range of audible sound (30 cps.--14,000 cps.) was captured on a disc via a meticulous and highly advanced technology which began at the recording studio and followed through all the mastering and manufacturing stages down to the pressing of the finished disc. Since that time ffrr has been recognized as **THE SYMBOL OF SOUND PROGRESS.**

With the advent of the London ffrr long playing disc in 1949, ffrr sound was again acknowledged to be the finest in the recording industry. Approximately eight years later, London's engineers began to develop and perfect stereophonic recording embodying the ffrr principle and, when in 1958 this unique system of stereophonic recorded sound was introduced to the public, it represented the utmost in sophisticated technology. Since then many improvements have been introduced by London's engineers to keep London technology in the forefront.

With ffrr you are listening to the finest in sound reproduction, for at London, progress never stops."



The first US issue of *England's Greatest Hitmakers* was manufactured in the UK and shipped to the US where they were put into US made stock covers. Indeed, the US release above says "Made in England" on the label. The master number is printed upside down on the label, as was the custom on U.K. Decca.

A Way of Life

The Stones first album found its audience within days of release. I'd be willing to bet that anyone who bought that first album is still eagerly awaiting the next Stones album. You see, the Rolling Stones are a way of life.

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