

Arts



Veteran interviewee: Mick Jagger

Intimate portrait that seeks to explain the Stones' success

Television

My Life as a Rolling Stone

BBC Two



By Ed Power

"What most documentaries do is repeat the same thing over and over," states Mick Jagger at the start of the BBC's *My Life as a Rolling Stone*. He says that as if it's a bad thing – but the makers of this four-part series celebrating the Stones' 60th anniversary (episode one airs on Saturday) appear to have taken it on as a suggestion.

No Stones cliché is left unturned as directors Oliver Murray and Clare Tavener trace the history of rock's original bad boys from the early British blues scene to their present-day status as age-defying juggernaut. The big coup has been to secure lengthy individual interviews with the three surviving members (the instalment focusing on late drummer Charlie Watts leans heavily on the archives) – along with laudatory contributions from Rod Stewart, Tina Turner, Jon Bon Jovi and others.

But that's as innovative as it gets in a documentary so generic it could have gone out on BBC Four's regular Friday night music slot without anyone batting an eyelid. There is some attempt at encouraging the band to dig deeper. It is suggested (very politely) to Mick that he might be a control freak. Keith is asked about his flirtations with heroin. Having

visited these topics a thousand times already, the Stones bat the questions back effortlessly.

"I'm not a control freak. Someone has to be in control of an enterprise like this," shrugs Jagger. "It's a rough old world. Sometimes you need something to blank it out," says Richards, with a defunctive chuckle.

My Life as a Rolling Stone will delight Stones diehards, who never tire of hearing Richards talk of his love of the blues. Or of watching old footage of Jagger being marched away by police after his 1967 drugs arrest at Richards' Redlands mansion (Mick worried what his mum would think).

One or two new nuggets are uncovered. Jagger, the focus of part one, takes issue with the idea he is the pop wizard in the ranks, Keith the haggard bluesman. It was Richards, he says, who noticed what The Beatles were doing and resolved to follow them into the charts. And it was the guitarist who was behind some of the Stones' catchiest moments. "Keith likes to write pop songs: lots and lots of pop songs," says Jagger. "*Ruby Tuesday*, *Angie*... these emanate from Keith originally."

These are charming insights, and there is always a vicarious thrill in hearing old rockers look back on their years of excess, as Ronnie Wood does in his episode. "Everyone was taking far too many drugs then," he recalls. "The whole band should have gotten into f----- rehab for a year. All of them – including me. But you know, you take the rough with the smooth."

The Stones' BST Hyde Park gig and Paul McCartney's at least as miraculous Glastonbury set at the age of 80 (both only last Saturday) make it clear that this generation of golden rockers have a few encores left in them yet. And, as we all bask in the feelgood factor from both events, a new Rolling Stones documentary would have been a fantastic opportunity to herald the group as a living, breathing entity.

My Life as a Rolling Stone is, to its credit, skilfully assembled – with enthusiastic narration by Sienna Miller. Yet, while adding to the great bonfire of Rolling Stones hagiographies, it ultimately does little to deepen our understanding of a band who remade rock 'n' roll in their own image.

On BBC Two and BBC iPlayer from Saturday



SANLÉ SORY: VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

A celebration of life's possibilities via the medium of fashion

Lucy Davies



Exhibition

Africa Fashion

V&A, London SW7



There is a lot to be said for a reassuring sloop around the Old Masters, or those bits of history you half-remember nostalgically from school. But a shot-in-the-arm exhibition that opens your eyes to something new is a rare and infinitely more thrilling bird.

Africa Fashion at the V&A is just such a show. Its 250 objects range from clothing and head coverings to fabric, stencils, LPs, posters and photographs, and they add up to a

sparkling picture of the continent's multifarious fashion scene.

It's a story of political change and empowerment as much as design; about how the simple act of dressing one's body can solidify and project a person's or a nation's identity. That combination is heady, and makes the exhibition feel alight.

We begin with the African cultural renaissance that enveloped the continent following the independence movement of the late 1950s and 1960s, as successive countries shook off their colonial shackles. A display of LP album covers – Miriam Makebo, Fela Kuti and so on – together with pamphlets, T-shirts and copies of *Drum* magazine bring that epochal moment vividly to life, as does a specially commissioned soundscape of music from across the continent, and stirring footage

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Uplifting: Sanlé Sory's *Je Vais Décoller* (1977), above; Alphadi cotton and brass dress from Niger, 1988, right

