

SHOWCASE

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Rolling Stones perform 150 minutes of their best

By KARLA TIPTON
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CLEVELAND — To many Rolling Stones fans, the highlight of their 1981 U.S. tour wasn't the disco hit "Miss You" nor the single current at the time, "Start Me Up." It was a

song that, at the time, was 17 years old — "Time Is On My Side."

The song captured the sentiments of the crowd. More than nostalgic, its magic seemed to center on the "miracle" of the Stones, a rock group which man-

aged to remain cohesive and pertinent for two decades. Yet it represented not only the durability of one band, but of rock 'n' roll itself.

The Stones must have noticed that the 1964 oldie was one of the few high points of the film

documentary of that tour, "Let's Spend the Night Together," because on their current "Steel Wheels" sweep through the country, their repertoire concentrates on classics rather than "recent" songs: "Gimme Shelter" and "Paint It Black" instead of "Just My Imagination" and "Let Me Go." The group, which performed Wednesday and Thursday at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, returns to the venue for sold-out shows Saturday and Sunday.

Judging by the band's Sept. 27 show at the Cleveland Municipal Stadium, the 27-year-old quintet are delivering what the over-30 spectators wished for in 1981: 150 minutes of their best. Fortunately it's not merely a reenactment of rock 'n' roll history for those who missed it the first time.

Armed with a solid album, *Steel Wheels*, and its first single, "Mixed Emotions" (their first really good single since "It's Only Rock 'N Roll"), the Stones have interwoven their strongest new songs with the classics: "Honky Tonk Women" and "Brown Sugar" among them.

Songs from every discernible stylistic phase through which the Stones ever passed darkly is included in the show — from blues to psychedelic ("Little Red Rooster," "2000 Light Years From Home") and from trendy pop to disco ("Ruby Tuesday," "Miss You").

Remembering that the term "recent" can refer to Stones songs dating back 10 years, the band kept these songs at a minimum, choosing only the strongest. The 25 songs in the show represent the years 1965-69, 1971-72, 1974, 1978, 1981, 1983, 1986 and 1989.

On this tour, the Stones have proven themselves better prepared musically. Mick Jagger's voice is in fine form, while Keith Richards' guitar work is improved over the last two U.S. tours and more on par with his solo tour last fall.

As far as stage presence, guitarist Ronnie Wood — who formerly provided a playful distraction from Jagger's onstage antics — has retreated to the back burner with drummer Charlie

Watts and bassist Bill Wyman, leaving the spotlight to the two leaders.

As always, Jagger remains the ultimate showman, albeit more toned down from past tours (and more tastefully dressed). He changes clothes to suit the material he's performing, rather than just stripping off items one by one as the show draws closer to the end.

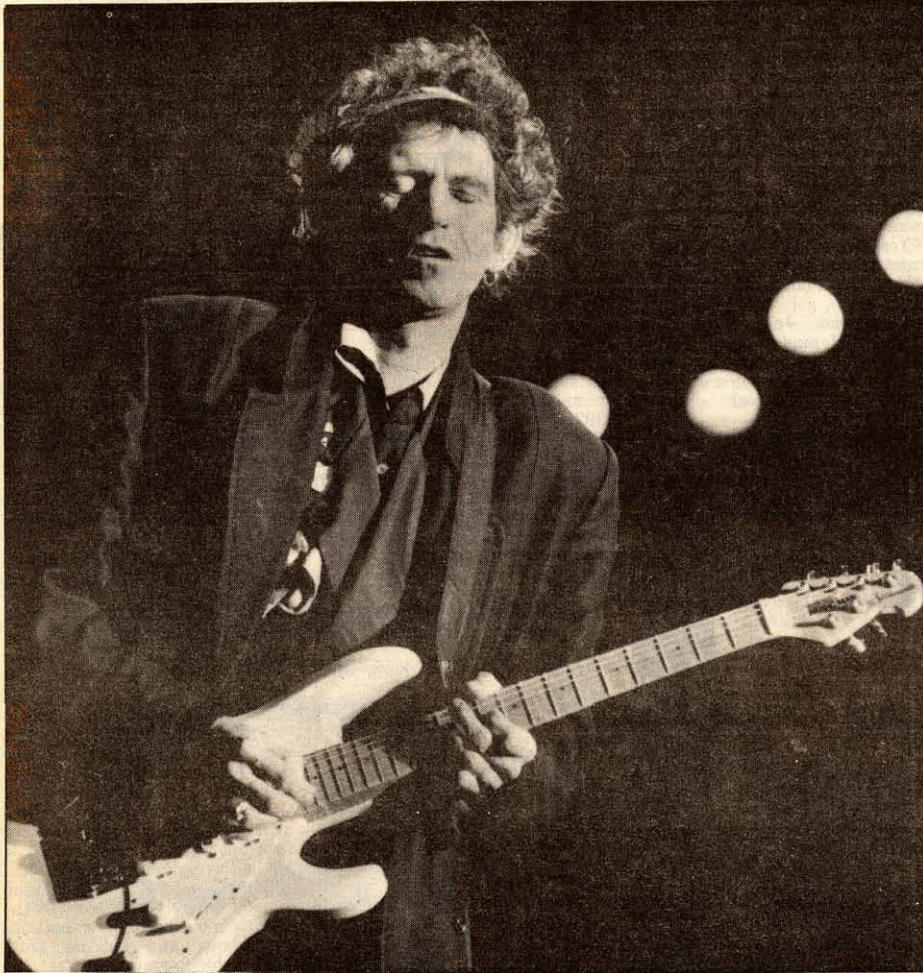
Richards also makes the rounds of the huge stage, occasionally visiting platforms at either side for guitar solos. His lead vocals on "Before They Make Me Run" and "Happy" reveal the good that came from making his own solo album and going on tour without the Stones.

If "Steel Wheels" is indeed the Stones' last tour, they will be leaving off at a high point in their career. As likely as not, however, the group has again managed to find a solid foothold in popular music, thus gaining a stronger position from which to launch the next album or tour.

Those attending the shows at the Coliseum should be prepared for an eight-hour shift (including driving time to and from the Antelope Valley), with hard rock groups Living Colour and Guns N' Roses opening up before the Stones come on with their 2½-hour performance. Doors open two hours before the 3:30 p.m. showtime. The Los Angeles Coliseum prohibits bottles, cans, drugs, alcohol, fireworks, weapons, cameras, tape recorders and video equipment.

Expect to see every age group represented, to be on your feet the entire time the Stones are performing and to pay high prices for souvenirs (\$13 for programs, \$20 for T-shirts). Don't worry too much if you have nose-bleed seats since there are three large video screens closing in on the onstage action. Binoculars also help.

Since just about everyone knows the words and sings along, a Rolling Stones concert is as much a participatory event as it is a spectator sport. You don't have to be in the front row to have fun.



KARLA TIPTON/valley press

KEITH RICHARDS takes a solo during the song "Bitch" at the Rolling Stones show in

Cleveland. The 27-year-old group returns for two more shows at the Los Angeles Coliseum.