



## The Rolling Stones

THE STUDIO ALBUMS VINYL COLLECTION 1971-2016

UNIVERSAL

RE-RELEASES

98

REVIEWS

If The Rolling Stones should have learned anything from their 50-plus years as a going concern, it's surely that sticking to what you know best isn't an unpardonable sin. There are shapeshifting artists down the years who've successfully hitched a ride on chart fashions and made acclaimed career U-turns in the process (Bowie, Madonna and Damon Albarn among them), but the Stones are not in that category. Evidence of this is in plentiful supply on this enormous 15-album collection that covers their studio output from 1971 onwards. Remastered at half speed at Abbey Road from the original tapes, these 180g heavyweight albums are housed in a sexy lenticular box.

We join the fun halfway through the Stones' peerless four-album run that started with *Beggars Banquet* and *Let It Bleed*, making amends for the creative misstep of psychedelic folly *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. *Sticky Fingers* (1971), which kicks off this boxset, is all killer and no filler: the band are at their creative and empathic peak here, with Mick Taylor in particular on stunning form.

The glorious mess of the sprawling *Exile On Main St.* has since been enshrined in rock legend as the Stones at their most debauched. It's a wonderful rambling tangle of a record – recorded badly in places, but positively spilling over with vicarious thrills.

Then, as most Stones fans will know, the ride gets a little bumpier – as the band have never been that consistently brilliant again. A trend begins to emerge on *Goats Head Soup* and *It's Only Rock 'N Roll*, which tends to hold firm for the vast majority of the remainder of their recording career: each album boasts three or four crackers worthy of inclusion on one of their global enormo tours, alongside

plenty of filler. Jagger's tendency to chase trends leads to some major howlers – the cod reggae of *Cherry Oh Baby* and pallid funk of *Hey Negrita* on *Black And Blue* are just two glaring examples.

The reaction to being labelled rock dinosaurs by the punk brigade pays dividends on the taut *Some Girls*, and *Emotional Rescue* has its moments, too. A surfeit of decent unreleased material is tickled up so that *Tattoo You* snatches victory from the jaws of potential defeat, but the rest of the early 80s marks the band's nadir. *Undercover* and *Dirty Work* find an estranged Jagger and Richards dialling in performances of songs that add nothing to the Stones' legacy.

The double whammy of *Steel Wheels* and *Voodoo Lounge* sees them revitalised once again, though, as if the band finally realised just how far they'd sunk. But you may struggle to find anything memorable on *Bridges To Babylon*, which tries too hard to be trendy.

*A Bigger Bang* finds Jagger's reportage lyric writing partly reinvigorated, and the band sound sprightly on the blues covers LP *Blue & Lonesome*.

At nigh-on £400 for this box, though, you may be better served by choosing half-a-dozen of the superior albums to savour. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

7/10

