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Composition

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ROLLING STONES: TRENDSETTERS

The Rolling Stones musical group has been a functional stage act for over forty years. Members Brian Jones (d. 1969), Mick Jagger, and Keith Richards, all of whom were/are friends with one another, formed the band in the early sixties. With the addition of drummer Charlie Watts, the Stones became a cohesive unit, joining in a movement commonly referred to as “the British invasion” (British Invasion). Unlike fellow British musicians, the Beatles and the Animals, the Stones’ members have maintained their collaborative format of concert entertaining, transcending decades of fickleness in popular music taste. This adaptation has enabled them to not only have continued success, but also to become the ‘grandfather’s of rock ‘n’ roll music’. This unofficial title is an indication of the respect the band is garnering in contemporary music circles.

The Rolling Stones are raising the highest echelon of musical concert production and marketing in the twenty-first century to a level in which only they can occupy. This occupation has been substantiated in particular by the “A Bigger Bang” tour. The traveling show, coupled with a CD release, thrust the Stones over the lamentations of critics, creating a new standard for tour production through theatrics, image management, and capitalizing on modern society’s moral standards.

The Bigger Bang tour took place from August 10, 2005 until its completion, August 26, 2007. Unprecedented in size, the stage on which the Stones performed

weighed 200 tons and measured 20, 000 square feet. Additionally, behind this massive platform stood a 2500 square foot wall, seven stories high, which streamed video footage to the audience below (STOUT). On top of this stage, fire works would shoot up into the air, exploding into patterns of various items, such as cars and flying bananas (STOUT). Although these pre-staged presentations may seem slightly surreal, the band managed to further their theatrics. Through the utilization of a diminutive stage, which was barely adequate in size for the four core group members, the band was capable of protruding into a crowd via a hydraulic system, allowing fans to be within a guitar's length. These theatrical devices are incredibly elaborate and totally unnecessary to put on a concert, yet the band included them to attract fans, inaugurating a new precedent for backdrop showmanship never seen before.

Every night, the band's canned performances evoked the carbon copied methodology of a franchised operation. Thus, these acts became standardized throughout the international tour, disallowing improvised action, which is the apex of a concert performance (BANGS). Granted, a smooth show would be expected to follow a routine, but surely a quality act would allow spontaneity in their performances. However, this allowance is nullified, and Mick Jagger proves this fact.

“In the old days, the best thing you could get was a residency at a club. Your life was formulaic. We'd play Tuesday nights at the Ealing Club, Friday nights at the Marquee, Saturday night somewhere, Sunday afternoons at Ken Colyer's and Sunday evenings in Richmond. You didn't worry about where your next gigs were coming from. And they were all within a five-mile radius” (FRIKE).

This statement to Rolling Stone magazine during the Bigger Bang tour is an admittance demonstration of how the band has sold-out to bigger, corporate interests over the 144 stop inter-continental tour. As a result, the tour netted, \$558 million US, an amount never seen before (RAWLINSON).

Although the Stones' charisma and style have carried them into the twenty-first century, they are still considered by many critics to not be of the same level of excellence as the Beatles (OLSEN). Additionally, other bands, such as the Grateful Dead, or solo acts, such as Neil Young and Bob Dylan, have maintained similar, uninterrupted continuity in their careers. Moreover, recent trends indicate there is a resurgence in the popularity of original rock 'n' roll artists. Current examples of this fact are the Guess Who, featuring their pre-seventies' lineup; and until his 2006 death, rock 'n' roll catalyst, Johnny Cash. These performers are actively demonstrating that the Stones are not independent wanderers in the niche of geriatric rock re-gentrification.

Yet by seeing proof through the Stones that major, corporate tours are possible, classic bands are now engaging in massive tours for career rejuvenation, which has never happened before. A clear example of this revitalized act of touring is eighties' heavy metal band, Iron Maiden, who is currently undergoing a sixty-six date tour—with a structure congruent to adding more dates—throughout twenty-nine countries (Iron Maiden).

Until the Bigger Bang tour, bands did not use the image of a peak physical specimen to draw fans. As an international icon, the Stones' front man, Jagger, has been called a singer who, “without looking too closely at the lines in his face, [is] easy to imagine...as a 20 something rocker with limitless energy” (STOUT). This appearance is

surprising for a man who was arrested on drug related charges in 1967. Jagger now works out six times per week, not only to feel good, but also to maintain his aging body. His routine preparation for touring includes kickboxing, swimming, plus a daily run of eight miles (REVOIR). In fact, during the Bigger Bang tour, Jagger demanded a personal workout room be affixed in the luxurious menagerie of side articles brought on the road. All of these examples were never seen before Jagger, whose image is starkly contrasted by long-time friend, Keith Richards.

Richards, a former heroin addict, now condones the use of drugs entirely, publicly advising contemporary British pop icon, Amy Winehouse, to “get her act together” (REVOIR). Once arrested in Canada for carrying twenty-two grams of heroin, Richards claims to have quit shooting the drug, not for health reasons, but because today’s illicit depressants are not strong enough for him (REVOIR). However, this publicity stunt, although outrageous, pales in comparison to his recent actions, such as (falsely) claiming to insufflate his father’s ashes with cocaine.

“I pulled the lid off [my father’s urn] and out comes a bit of dad on the dining room table... I’m going, ‘I can’t use the brush and dustpan for this’... What I found out is that ingesting your ancestors is a very respectable way of... y’know, he went down a treat. (Keith Richards: ‘I DID snort my dad’s ashes’.)

Richard’s later told reporters that he was lying and added, ““I wouldn’t take cocaine at this point in my life... unless I wished to commit suicide” (LODER). This retraction of claim, although still maintaining a melodramatic tone, is a demonstration of how Richards commandeers what is printed in the media, in order to enhance his image in the public spectrum.

Any entertainer's success relies on the support of the public—without fans there is simply no fame. Throughout the Bigger Bang tour, the Stones sold 4.6 million tickets, which again is another unprecedented number (RAWLINSON). Fan support was so overwhelming, in fact, that ninety-seven percent of tickets were already claimed by the time of the tour's first show in Boston (The album press release). This evidence, never seen before, shows that the Stones theatrics and media plots do work and do sway the public in their favour.

Although larger, more typical venues, capable of holding larger crowds, were chosen for the Bigger Bang concerts, the Stones also decided to perform in areas that most major performers shy away from: Ukraine; Serbia; Missoula, Montana; Regina, Saskatchewan. By choosing these obscure venues, the band not only allows fans in abnormal destinations to see a performance, but they also attract and hold new fans' interest. This wager shows that the band is marketing itself in areas that other bands previously have not, and yet they can still be successful in doing so.

By performing in such a vast array of locations, on a tour that stretched over two years, the band created a lot of pollution. Conscious of the environment, the band took measures to buy carbon offsets and planted trees. Though these acts may look like—and very could be—publicity stunts, the band took the initiative to do them, joining other contemporary artists in setting a trend, as Jagger states, "We were part of this whole thing where we planted lots of trees, like [contemporary stars] Coldplay... We didn't make a huge publicity stunt about it but we did it" (Stones to headline Wight festival).

The Rolling Stones, like many bands of their time, have cascaded through decades of tumultuous style change in music. However, while other geriatric bands simply recycle

old material, the Stones not only make new products and performances, but also make those products and performances on the cutting edge. Many bands today aspire to tour as large and lavish as the Stones, but none have come close to doing so with the same style, size, and charisma. Through the utilization of extreme stages and theatrics, the Stones have captivated audiences on their monstrous “A Bigger Bang” tour. This tour set records for selling millions of tickets, which garnered the band millions of dollars. All of these gratuities were accomplished through band members cunningly controlling the media; the Stones portraying themselves as martyrs of rock ‘n’ roll in both the past and the present. Although many bands will try to accomplish these same goals, they will most likely be undertaking efforts in vain. The Stones have set this bar because they are, and will continue to be, rock ‘n’ roll’s supreme band of touring advancements.

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