

Rolling Stone Bill Wyman candidly admits the success of his solo single, 'Je Suis Un Rock Star', has helped ease some basic insecurities. But lest this raises doubts about the position of the diminutive bass player in the "world's greatest rock 'n' roll band", he quickly points out: "Everybody has insecurities — Keith, Mick, Charlie, myself. At the back of your head there's always this feeling of 'was I just lucky to have been in this band, to have been there at the right time and am I really as good as the rest of the guys?'"

After close to 20 years with the Rolling Stones, Wyman doesn't stop trying. "You are always trying to prove to yourself that it's OK," he says. "I think Mick did it with movies, or attempted to do it with movies, and it's nice to have a solo success, so you feel I really did deserve it after all."

Bill and his lady of 15 years, Astrid Nundstrom, are in the middle of an Australian "holiday" which has become an intensive round of media meetings and promotional work. Wyman's break after the Stones' American tour is part pleasure, much work. He is promoting his follow-up single, 'Come Back Suzanne', his soon-out solo album (his third, but the other efforts were some time ago), getting a word in here and there for the heist movie *Green Ice* for which he did the soundtrack, and paying the way for a Stones' tour of Australia and New Zealand in September-October.

The trip had been planned for February — the band was last here in early '73 — but the U.S. tour was extended by three weeks, leaving the Stones too exhausted to consider jumping into a Far Eastern swing. "It was an enormous success," says Wyman. "It was incredible. We played before 2.5 million people, we did 51 concerts. The tour doubled our expectations, but it was so long that it didn't give us time for a Christmas break with our families and then jump back into rehearsals."

The figures from the U.S. tour are extraordinary — a gross of more than \$42 million, with \$30 million in ticket sales and the band taking \$23.8 million. The success of this latest venture by the world's oldest rockers is expected to inject new life into what had been a fading American tour scene.

Although the Stones tour only relatively occasionally these days, Wyman says the feeling is still there; it's just that it's dif-



ficult to organise. "Each member of the band plus Ian Stewart (a founding member of the band, now sometime piano player and tour manager) has a vote on whether we go on the road. If one says no, that's it," Bill says.

"And even if we all decide to tour it is such a huge operation. There were 70 in our road crew in America and we used three different stages."

The excitement of the American tour was matched by Wyman's buzz at the success of his 'Je Suis' single. "It felt like it did way back when the first Stones' single came out," he says. "I just did the single for fun really. The song was written for Ian Dury, because I don't really write songs for the band. There's one on the album Kenny Rogers could do. But the song wasn't sent to Ian Dury because everyone tried to persuade me to do it. So I said I'll do one single and see if it is successful ..."

It is Wyman, the "silent Stone" ("nobody ever asked me anything," he grins), who has had by far the greatest solo success — but he stresses that even though excited by his outside work it is still the band that comes first. As he believes the solo record has nothing to do with the Stones he won't be performing it on tour — nor will he be going out as The Bill Wyman Band. "I'm too shy," is the response to the unthinkable suggestion.

The Jagger-Richards' domination that excluded all other song-writing efforts was a source of frustration to Wyman in earlier days. Now he can live with it. With less pressure on the Stones than there was in the early 70s he can find time for other work. Apart from his own occasional recordings, he has worked as sideman and record producer. Some of his early efforts have long been relegated to the bargain bins, but he has had quite a degree of success with an album by Chicago bluesmen Buddy Guy and Junior Wells released last year on the Red Lightnin' label under licence from Wyman's own Ripple Records.

Recorded at Montreux in 1974, the tapes of a sterling Guy-Wells workout (with Wyman on bass) had been gathering dust until Wyman got to work. "The album, *Drinkin' TNT 'n'*

Smokin' Dynamite, sold 10,000 copies in England, which is great for a blues album," says Wyman, who also laid down the bottom on Howling Wolf's *London Sessions* album.

As a producer, Wyman has just finished six tracks with the Stray Cats, whom he calls "good mates". He has the Cats signed to his label and plans a rock 'n' roll album with them. He regards the Cats as a great live band who haven't been captured fully on disc. The Stray Cats had asked Wyman to produce their second album but he wasn't available. One awaits with interest the results of the collaboration.

Bill gets a giggle out of the name of the American version of his record company. "It's called Penand, which becomes Penand Inc. Can you believe nobody had ever registered the name before? So now I have a couple of subsidiaries — Indian Inc, Invisible Inc — for ghostwriters."

Another project close to Wyman's heart is a photo-essay book on his near-neighbour in the South of France, the artist Marc Chagall. Wyman has done the photographs for the book for which the 96-year-old Chagall has contributed seven pen-and-ink drawings and four watercolours.

"I got very interested in art in France and while I'm not an art collector, I'm very interested. Chagall's art is very dreamlike, a fairyland, fantasy sort of thing. He still works and lives in the forest about seven or eight minutes' drive from my house. There is a whole community of very interesting people that live around there — James Baldwin the writer, Ken Follett who wrote *Eye of the Needle*, Bjorn Borg lives up the road, David Niven. It's nice, you can mix with very interesting people."

And what do they think of their rock musician neighbour?

"They are interested in music, they think of rock and roll and today's music as an art form. Some of them collect records. Ken Follett, for instance, has almost as comprehensive a collection of Rolling Stones' records as I have."

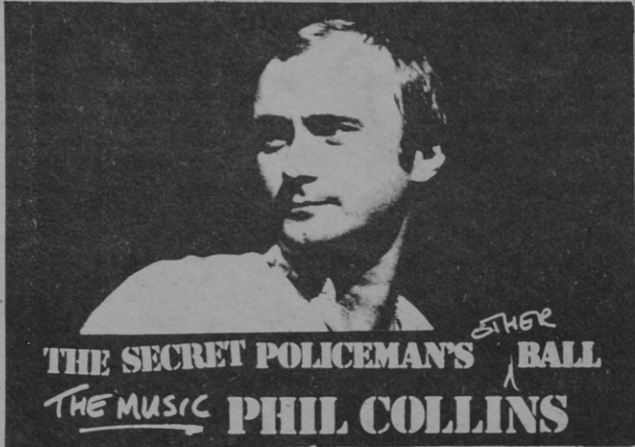
Wyman himself is a collector and a diarist. He began collecting Rolling Stones' memorabilia for his son Stephen, now 19 but a mere nine months old when Daddy became a Rolling Stone. He wanted to show the boy he had once been in a band. Still there, Bill is now the reference point for anyone wanting data on the Stones. He now has his own computer into which he feeds information with a view to one day publishing a view from the inside, although he has no immediate plans to do so.

"There has never been a book that has told the truth about the Stones," Wyman says. Asked about the sleazy *Up and Down with the Rolling Stones* by Tony Sanchez, Bill dismisses it as a load of rubbish. "Most of these books come out from people you have never met. They get their information from press clippings and the same mistakes are carried on."

When and if Bill's book is published, he hopes to make it a David Niven-ish, *Moon's A Balloon* type of thing. With his dry sense of humour he could well pull it off.

Humour is one thing Wyman misses about living away from England. He also misses sport, good television and custard. "The French can't laugh at themselves the way the British can and they won't go out of their way to help you if you can't speak the language." In fact, the French wanted him to tidy up his Cockney Franglais before 'Je Suis Un Rock Star' was released in France. "They said, 'But some of your French in the song is wrong'. They just didn't get it."

Ken Williams



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