

Between The Buttons

A First

Between The Buttons was the fifth British and seventh American studio album of the Rolling Stones. It was the first Stones album ever to use identical cover art for both album versions. Released in the UK on January 20, 1967 and in the US on February 11, 1967 it is also the first Rolling Stones album cover to have a splash of natural color. It's a cover that people remember, the Stones in overcoats on a cold day. It's a little trippy. Did the Stones leave the title and band name off again? No, look at Charlie Watts' buttons.



The cover photograph was shot by Gered Mankowitz, who also did the *out of our heads* *THE ROLLING STONES*/december's children (and everybody's) THE ROLLING STONES** and *Big Hits High Tide and Green Grass The Rolling Stones* covers. The spontaneity and innovative imagery of *Between The Buttons* matched the mystique and persona of the Stones at the time and brought Mankowitz to a young creative summit.

Mankowitz said, "I think I contributed a lot when I did the cover of the album *Between The Buttons*. My contribution in the earlier sessions was based more on an honesty, a desire to

communicate something about the Stones as people and not try and mask their personalities with any sort of technical or theatrical embellishments. I think that that's why (their manager) Andrew (Loog Oldham) liked the pictures and why the band were happy to work with me for such a long period of time, because I photographed them as they were. And then when it came to *Between The Buttons*, I felt confident enough as a photographer and in my relationship with them to actually make a contribution... I don't think I did a conceptual cover until, you know, late in '66 when I did "*Between The Buttons*." The story of *Between The Buttons'* cover art is the story of Gered Mankowitz, told largely through his own words and recollections.

This was an era when album covers were becoming a true artform. Gazing at the images could enhance the listening experience. The synesthesia of listening to a new album while cover gazing and turning on was "a thing" for many a Stones fan. Mankowitz said, "I recognized the importance of the record cover as it was as the fan's primary link with the band. I always treated it as an artform while working within the limitations. And there were limitations; record companies printed the images on the same cardboard used for toilet rolls. Yet in many ways I think myself and other photographers working at that time set down a blueprint for the album cover, one which is still in use by music photographers today."

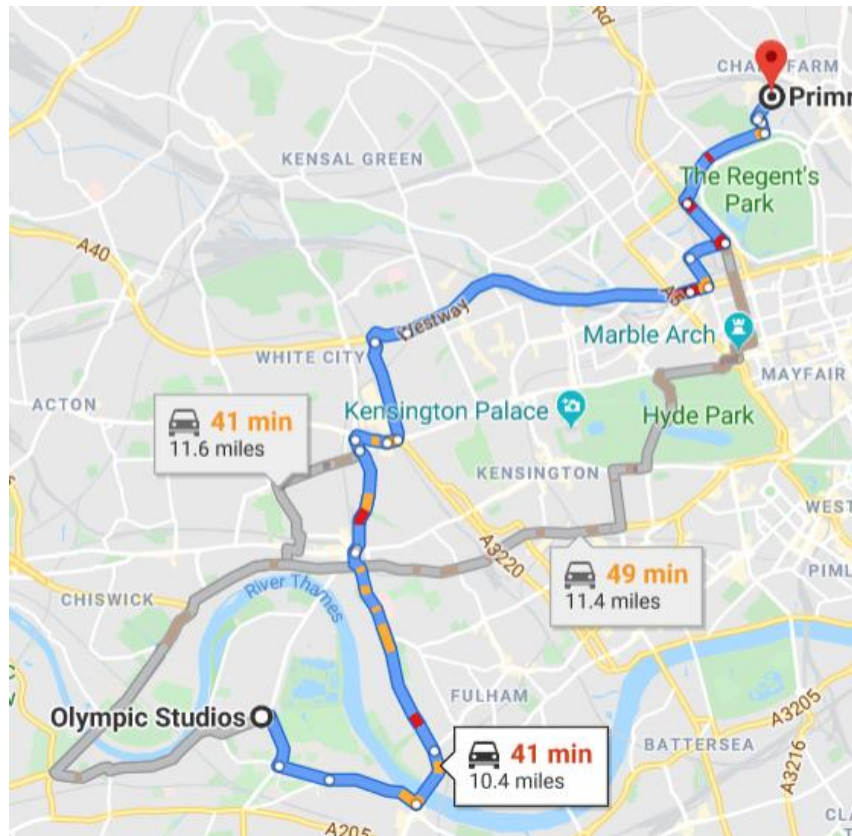
Keith Richards said, “*Between The Buttons* was the first record we made when we hadn't been on the road and weren't shit-hot from playing gigs every night. Plus, everyone was stoned out of their brains... *Between The Buttons* was the first time we took a breath and distanced ourselves a little from the madness of touring and all. So, in a way, to us it felt like a bit of a new beginning. But not everybody was in great shape. Brian was starting to be wonky at the time.” In 1969 Mick Jagger added, “*Between The Buttons* is my least favorite Stones album. I didn't like none of it. I can't even remember doing it.” Welcome to *Between The Buttons*.

The Title

Oldham suggested that Charlie Watts design the back cover of the new album. As Watts was planning his cartoons for the back he asked Oldham what the album title would be. Oldham had not yet decided and was uncertain so he told Watts the title would be between the buttons, meaning I don't know yet. In the February 4, 1967 *Melody Maker*, Watts said, “Andrew (Oldham) told me to do the drawings for the LP and said the title would be between the buttons. I thought he meant the title was *Between The Buttons*, so it stayed. “*Between The Buttons* is a phrase Watts uses six times in his cartoons. Buttons play such a prominent part in Watts' work that it had to be the title.

The Location

The Stones were working on *Between The Buttons* from November 3 through 26 in 1966 in



Olympic Studios at 117 Church Street in Barnes, which is in west London. Mankowitz described the recording studio as a sort of hangout where he spent a lot of time with the band, photographing what was going on and just hanging out. Early one morning they all came out of the studios onto the street, Mankowitz looked at the band as they hugged themselves against the cold and he thought, “...you know, they look like the f**king Stones. That's how the Stones should look.” His cover idea was

born. So, he told Oldham he thought they should do a photo session early in the morning after an all-night recording session. Oldham and the Stones agreed, so they set it up. Whether it was for the next night or a few nights later, Mankowitz cannot remember.

Let Mankowitz pick up the story, “They were recording at Olympic. In those days, they used to start about ten, eleven at night and go until six or seven in the morning. I often spent the night with them, hanging around, taking pictures. One morning as we tumbled into the dawn, I turned around and looked at them and I thought ‘Jesus, they look just like the Rolling Stones.’ Everything that we thought about the Rolling Stones was embodied in this sort of blur. They were out of focus, if you know what I mean. And I said to [Oldham], ‘I think it would be great to do a session right now.’ “

Primrose Hill is a hill of 213 feet (65 m) located on the northern side of Regent's Park in London. The name was given also to the surrounding district. The hill summit has a clear view of central London, as well as Hampstead and Belsize Park to the north and is adorned by an engraved quotation from William Blake. Wikipedia

Mankowitz grabbed his gear, which included a Hasselblad 500C, 50mm lens, and Kodak film and they all piled into two or three cars and headed to Primrose Hill which is this high point just north of Regent's Park in NW London where I thought we'd get really good early morning light. Memory being a fungible thing in another Mankowitz telling everyone piled into Oldham's Rolls Royce and headed for Primrose Hill.

They likely left the studio about 530 am.

Mankowitz suggested Primrose Hill, which was on the other side of London some 11 miles away. In those days and at that hour it only took them about twenty-five minutes to drive there. Mankowitz wanted early light, sky, trees. He took them up to the hill and they all piled out at the foot of the hill to walk to the top. They walked through the gates and wandered slowly, stoned and cold as planned. Mankowitz said he always knew the shoot would be on Primrose Hill.

When they reached the top of the hill, there was this well-known London character called Maxie, sort of a hippy prototype, just standing on his own playing the flute. Mick walked up to him and offered him a joint and his only response was “Ah, breakfast!” It was at the top of Primrose Hill that the shoot took place.



Sunrise at Primrose Hill

Mankowitz preferred shooting in the studio but with the Stones albums it was different. He said, "I always wanted to be studio based because I wanted my subjects to come to me and commit to having their photograph taken, but that didn't mean that I didn't shoot on location when it was required. In the early days all my studio sessions were supplemented with a few rolls taken outside the studio, usually in Mason's Yard or Ormond Yard and that was where *Out of Our Heads* was shot. *Between The Buttons* was always planned to be taken on location on Primrose Hill." He chose it because he thought that being high up and being very early in the morning in November, that they might get the early light.

The Shoot

Mankowitz knew they only had about 20 minutes for the shoot because everyone was tired, stoned, and cold. The timing for the shoot is often reported as an early hour. Sunrise in London during the weeks the Stones were in the studio was roughly between 700 and 730 am, so the shoot began around that time. The photo was taken at the absolute peak of the band's original success, before things took a bad turn with the death of Brian Jones.



Mankowitz had constructed a filter out of black card and glass, on which he smeared Vaseline. He could change the distortion by smearing the Vaseline in different ways, in a circle, or diagonally or whatever was needed. He had set this up in advance of the shoot and strapped it to his Hasselblad. He said, "Today all you would have to do to achieve this look is hit 'gaussian blur' on Photoshop. I swirled vaseline on the edges of the lens and fashioned a cardboard hood that covered the

corners of the frame. That was how you realized a vision back then."

"Andrew was an extraordinarily visionary person and incredibly important to the Stones' history, and certainly incredibly crucial to my career. And, although I've never asked him, I think he felt that because of my youth - my naivety, if you like - I wasn't going to impose anything on the Stones. He'd used Bailey to do at least one session with the band before, but I think that Bailey, being seven or eight years older than me, being much better technically and being part of a very glamorous group, almost unavoidably created a patina of glamour on what he photographed. And I think that Andrew felt that I would get a rawness that was perhaps more appropriate to the Stones and their look at the time. But he used to say to me, 'If you don't do well, I'm taking them back to Bailey.' So 'back to Bailey' was a sort of threat!" Gerred Mankowitz

What he wanted was for the band to sort of blur, to disappear into the environment in a sort of trippy, acidy way. Mankowitz said, "I'd never taken acid so I didn't really know what I was doing but I just guessed. I just guessed on sort of a visual trippiness. And that's what I did." This produced the vaporous, druggy aesthetic of the *Between The Buttons* shoot.

Mankowitz succeeded in making the Stones look like they were dissolving into their surroundings. The goal of the shoot in Mankowitz's words was, "to capture the ethereal, druggy feel of the time; that feeling at the end of the night when dawn was breaking and they'd been up all night making music, stoned." He succeeded.

About midway into the 20 minutes or so he had for the shoot, Jones was being difficult and really playing it up. He would not look at the camera, he hid in the great

big teddy that he had, he was reading a newspaper that he brought along, Mankowitz felt he was not really contributing. At that point Mankowitz turned to Oldham and said he was worried about Brian's behavior, he was just not cooperating. Oldham said you don't have to worry about Brian because anything that he does can only contribute to the image of The Rolling Stones. "So don't worry about him. If he's got his back to you, it will make a great picture. Just do what you're doing. And, of course, that freed me up completely, released my anxiety about Brian. I ignored him and his shenanigans. And, of course, Andrew was completely right. He knew that the Stones had reached a point that it almost didn't matter what they did individually because that just contributed to what The Stones were visually and their identity in the eyes of

the public. They were this group, this gang, who could do anything they liked. And you just had to accept it. That was the Stones." Oldham had a band where if you couldn't see all five of them equally or smilingly or looking into the camera, it didn't matter. It just made them more intriguing. The composition of the photographs were mostly Mankowitz's ideas with some input from Oldham and a great deal of help from the group.



Oldham was around during the Stones sessions because he was very much part of that process but he never really got in the way. He was always trying to help, Mankowitz reports. The whole point of the *Between The Buttons* pictures is that Mankowitz was consciously trying to get an image of a band that had a vagueness to it, where you didn't have to be presented with everything in detail. He was experimenting by putting Vaseline on the lens and using strange distorted colors. The front cover didn't actually have words on it except for the words *Between The Buttons* on Charlie Watt's buttons on his jacket. They were trying to break away from the tradition of the first few album covers.

Mankowitz said, "...from what I saw, I could see that this was working and I just went with it and I didn't really worry too much about whether half of Keith's face was dissolving into the sky or not because it just felt weird and freaky and trippy. That session was all color except for one

roll at the end which I did in black and white because I felt they were still going to need black and white as a support for whatever it was, but primarily I shot color. I think I only shot three or four rolls. I don't think I had time to shoot much else."

Goldmine said Mankowitz really upped his game on the "Between The Buttons" cover calling it a real work of art. He had to know how the Stones were stepping into the foray of psychedelia , it must have been on his mind leading up to the cover shoot. He did.

The Cover

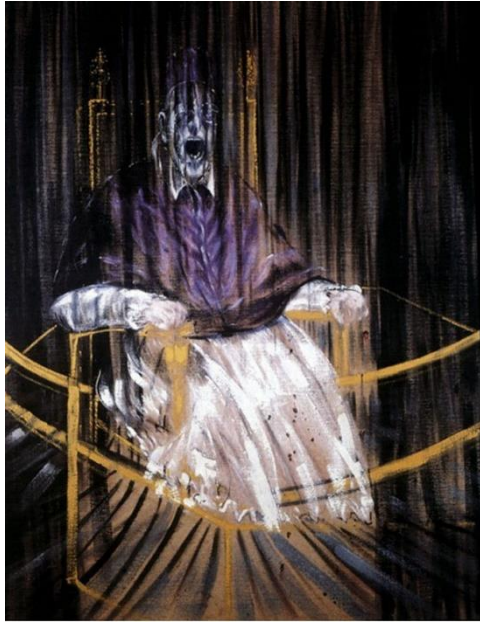
This was the first instance in which the UK ad US versions of the album used the same cover. Outtakes from this photo session were later used for the cover and inner sleeves of the 1972 compilation release *More Hot Rocks (Big Hits & Fazed Cookies)* seen below.



It's the cover people remember. Mankowitz shot the Stones bundled against November's morning chill with the picture blurring at the edges, an effect Gered Mankowitz achieved by smearing Vaseline on his camera lens. It functions as a sort of code for acid, the creeping psychedelia of the day and general distortion of the truth. The trees, the grass, the natural environment all blur and begin to fade away. Each of the Stones is a character in his own rite. Charlie Watts is out front looking dapper in his button-down collar and tie with square-jawed



reserve he appears interested in something off to his left. Mick Jagger engages the camera full on with a look of curious disdain. Brian has been described as grinning maniacally in the way of a village idiot. Brian Jones' disheveled and gaunt appearance on the cover disturbed many of his fans, and critic David Dalton wrote that he looked "like a doomed albino raccoon." Mankowitz



said later, "I was frustrated because it felt like we were on the verge of something really special and he was messing it up. But the way Brian appeared to not give a shit is exactly what the band was about."

Bill Wyman has the serious look of a high school graduate sitting for a mandatory portrait. Keith's fledgling grin and his beginning fade into the environment has been likened to Francis Bacon's screaming pope. Decide for yourself. I'm not feeling it.

The Record Mirror of 28 January 1967 said the Stones sleeves never seem to look very different, but this one is more clever and more subtle than the rest. The back of the sleeve is far more unpretentious than is the current group trend.

The Stones had something of a tradition of no title or band name on the front cover. Once again, the front cover didn't actually have words on it except for the words *Between The Buttons* and The Rolling Stones in very small font on Charlie's coat buttons.

"Between The Buttons" has also been said to have had another meaning underneath it, one that always had a slightly erotic connotation as well. The buttons on Watts' blazer were just happenstance, they just glowed in the early morning light. Mankowitz said, "Andrew was inspired to put the text, the type in there. I mean that was his idea. I'm not sure whether the record company was wild about it, but they went with it, you know? Because you know in those days, in that mid-60s period, the record companies, although, yes, they asserted themselves, they insisted that their logo went in the top left or the top right. ...They were immovable on those things. But they were also in the dark about why this music was such a phenomenal success and they needed people like Andrew and I guess me as well ... young photographers, young managers, to keep them in the loop. Because these old men who ran the record companies, they had no idea."

Mankowitz reports that the album cover image was actually lost. "In those days we didn't make duplicates of the transparencies - nobody wanted to spend that sort of money - and so when I presented the work to Andrew Oldham, he selected this one as the cover and it was cut off the strip and sent to the printers and never returned. It's a bit of a tragedy but I have lots of outtakes." One of those outtakes is called "Smiling Buttons." It is interesting to consider how

the band's image might have been altered or the how the reception of the album itself may have been affected had Smiling Buttons been chosen as the cover.



A happy optimistic photo of the five Stones together has its appeal but the actual cover selection speaks more to who the Stones were and what lay before them. The Stones made the right choice. Many of the outtakes from the session have names dealing with buttons, like 'Behind the Buttons' or 'Over the Buttons.'

Mankowitz thought this shoot might produce a cover. That was his plan. The more common approach for choosing an album cover at the time was for a manager or a record company to go through pictures that were on their desk and say, 'That would make a good cover.' Mankowitz said that in many ways *Between The Buttons* "...was the very first conceptual cover, because really until that moment covers were not planned. I had realised that very early on and, because of that, I always tried to shoot my sessions with covers in the back of my mind - in a square format on the Hasselblad so that it was a tailor-made album sleeve shape and incorporating the space for the band's name and the record company logo, because those were the things that guided the record company in choosing a picture. So, this was definitely shot with an album cover in mind, although beyond that there was no specific concept other than my own wish to try and communicate something about the druggy, trippy general atmosphere that was pervading the world at that time, or our world at least."

He thought the shot went better than expected. He thought it was great stuff, very interesting. He was very comfortable and confident showing the results to Oldham. Mankowitz could not remember if he had experimented with his homemade filter in the studio or if he used it for the first time on Primrose Hill. "I think he was really pleased and ... we haven't talked about it, but you know what was really important in those days, that disappeared, is trust. Andrew trusted me. I mean he encouraged me, he nurtured me, he mentored me, but he trusted me. And the

band trusted me. Because you had to. You know, if you're going to work with someone in those days you had to trust them. "



The Rear Cover

The rear cover was dominated by a six-panel cartoon and accompanying rhythmic poem written and drawn by Watts. The cartoon tells the story of the variable, sometimes two-faced, reaction of the music industry to the band. It uses the album title repeatedly. Wyman describes the cartoon as "...characterizing our popularity but making the graphic point that we had been rejected by the music-industry authorities." Watts designed the back cover and wrote the

following poem to add to the back sleeve. The four lines of verse were entirely contained within an oversized set of parentheses, set off by the title and band buttons seen below.



'Between The Buttons'!
To understand this little rhyme
You must tap your foot in time
Then the buttons come much nearer
And the Stones you see more clearer.



Panel 1: Shows a crowd of concert goers clamoring for the Stones, three times saying, "We want the Stones!" The caption reads: 'Between The Buttons' started as a laugh but pretty soon turned into a farce.

Panel 2: Shows four individuals. Following Wyman's comments they are likely members of the music industry. Person 1 says, "in all my years in show business." Person 2 says, "are they for real?" Person 3 says, "all head and no bread." Person 4 says, "wait till I tell my wife." The caption reads: 'Between The Buttons' between the fibres we know a lot have called us liars.

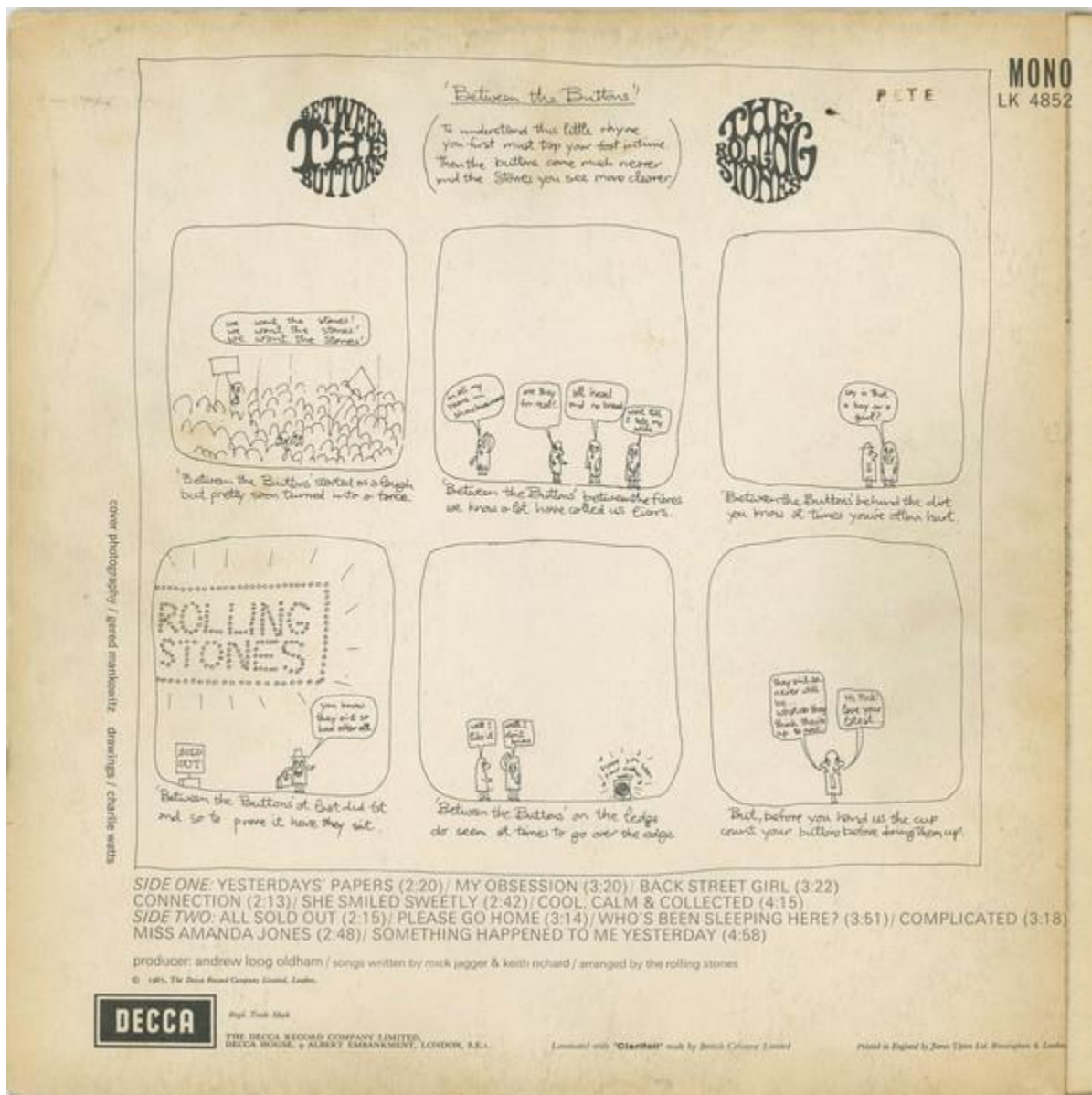
Panel 3: Shows two people a smiling person says, "is that a boy or a girl?..." The caption reads: 'Between The Buttons' behind the dirt you know at times you've often hurt."

Panel 4: Shows "Rolling Stones" in light with a 'sold out' sign and a person with an attache case (author query: possibly filled with cash from the sold out show) saying, "you know they ain't so bad after all." The caption reads: 'Between The Buttons' at last did fit and so to prove it here they sit."

Panel 5: Shows two people talking while a radio plays "have you seen your mother baby." Person 1 says, "well I like it." Person 2 says, "well I don't know." The caption reads: 'Between The Buttons' on the ledge do seem at times to go over the edge.

Panel 6: Shows a two-faced person. Out of one side of their mouth they say "they ain't as..never will be..what do they think they're up to now.." Out of the other side they say, "Hi, Mick! Love your latest...." The caption reads: But, before you hand us the cup count your buttons before doing them up.

The playlist follows in all capitals below the cartoon. Credits in all lower case follow the tracklist and appear vertically on the left edge of the cartoon.



Track Listings

The track listings for the UK and US version differed despite the identical album art. The UK version had 'Please Go Home' and 'Back Street Girl,' in their place the US version had 'Let's Spend the Night Together' and 'Ruby Tuesday.'

UK Release January 20, 1967		US Release February 11, 1967	
Side 1	Side 2	Side 1	Side 2
Yesterday's Papers	All Sold Out	Let's Spend the Night Together 3:29	All Sold Out 2:15
My Obsession	Please Go Home	Yesterday's Papers 2:20	My Obsession 3:20

Back Street Girl	Who's Been Sleeping Here?	Ruby Tuesday 3:12	Who's Been Sleeping Here? 3:51
Connection	Complicated	Connection 2:13	Complicated 3:18
She Smiled Sweetly	Miss Amanda Jones	She Smiled Sweetly 2:42	Miss Amanda Jones 2:48
Cool, Calm & Collected	Something Happened To Me Yesterday	Cool, Calm & Collected 4:15	Something Happened To Me Yesterday 4:58

After the Buttons

Gered Mankowitz ended his run with the Stones in 1967 when their relationship with Oldham really fell apart. Mankowitz tells this story best as well. "The recording studio was where it was all going down. The atmosphere was pretty awful. Andrew was very frustrated, not really sure

When asked which band was more interesting to work with Mankowitz said, "the Beatles had their moments visually and there were two or three fabulous covers right at the beginning. Rubber Soul is fantastic. But the Stones had something magical. They didn't appear to play any game. The Beatles—at the beginning at least—were always willing to smile, grin, pose. Shirts and ties, for Chrissake! They looked clean. Your granny liked the Beatles,. It was terrible. But the Stones? They'd piss anywhere, man."

what was going on. Mick and Keith were becoming increasingly insular and darker and they were more stoned or more drunk, coming in at all different times. There was a sort of ... chaos. And it was all about rejecting the daddy. Getting rid of Andrew, wanting more input, wanting more say. And I knew my days were numbered because (photographer) Michael Cooper suddenly appeared in the recording studio. He'd arrive with the band and, you know, they were sharing a new lifestyle (drugs and alcohol) which I wasn't part of and didn't have any desire to be part of. So, I knew the writing was on the wall. And then one evening Andrew and I were in the control room, Mick

walked in with Michael Cooper in front of me, and said to Andrew, "This is what the new cover (Their Satanic Majesties Request) is going to be and Michael is going to be shooting it." And I knew then that the writing was on the wall because up until that point, Andrew had been, not necessarily 100% in control of the image, but he'd been incredibly influential. He had been very much a part of making that image work. So that was it. It was all over..."



The Stones have, if not given birth to many ancillary careers, an association with them has nurtured many careers. Between The Buttons was a turning point for Mankowitz as a photographer. It was a major moment in his life and career. He describes it like this, "it's always going to be...the most important moment in my career." Of that time in 1967, he says, "...it wasn't fun being around the Stones anymore. They weren't the people who I'd loved in '65 and '66. They were changing. And I didn't really question that. It just

wasn't fun. And if it wasn't fun I really didn't want to be part of it." And so he was not and new artists took over where Mankowitz left off.

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