THE ROLLING STONES

The Rolling Stones, September 23, 1981
JFK Stadium Philadelphia, PA.

The Rolling Stones perform live and encore the impression that can be cleared from their recent albums. This is not the same band it was 15 years ago, and the music scene has changed, and so have the Stones.

The Stones were once known as the bad boys of rock and roll. They seemed to delight in inciting controversy and indignation in everything they did. However, in the decade and a half since those early days, the Stones have become so popular and their influence so widespread that they have become acceptable, even, as one of their songs suggests, "respectable."

They almost seem eager to avoid controversy as they used to cause it. For example, lyrics on their latest album, "Tattoo You," are as innocent as those of almost any top-40 group. Also notable is the complete absence on this tour of Jagger's ridiculous stage attire of the ‘75 and ‘76 tours.

The concert at JFK Stadium was a testimonial to the media hype. Helicopters with TV crews aboard soared overhead continuously. Local newspapers reported headlines about the Stones for days before the concert. Radio stations featured all-Stones programming. Thousands of fans camped outside the stadium doors the night before the concert.

The doors opened shortly after 7am for a scheduled 11am start of the first warm-up band, George Thorogood and the Destroyers. Thorogood played a fairly good set of Chuck Berry tunes and other rock and roll standards, along with a few originals. The next band, Journey, was extremely boring and fortunately, due to poor crowd response, only played for about 40 minutes.

The weather was perfect for an outdoor concert: sunny and warm, with a slight breeze. Early afternoon, when most of the 90,000-plus crowd had taken their seats, I realized that this was the worst concert audience I had ever been in (and I've been in some bad ones—including the Who concert in Cincinnati). People were, for the most part, rude, loud, obnoxious, wasted out of their minds and, often, hostile. I hate to think what would have happened if the Stones had cancelled.

The Stones finally took the stage at 4pm, two hours after Journey left the stage, opening with "Under My Thumb." Maybe Jagger, at 38, can't move as fast or jump as high as he once could, but he can still excite audiences almost to a frenzy. The rest of the Stones (joined by Ian McLagan on keyboards and Ian Stewart on piano), demonstrated their years of experience of playing to large audiences, looking as smooth and professional as ever and pumping out some great rock and roll.

The Stones played for almost 2½ hours, running through such standards as "Honky Tonk Women," "Jumpin' Jack Flash," "Let It Bleed," "Brown Sugar," "Tumbling Dice," "You Can't Always Get What You Want," and "Street Fighting Man," as well as 7 of the 11 songs on their new album. There were a few surprises as well, such as "Let's Spend the Night Together," and "Time Is On My Side." After and encore of "Satisfaction," fireworks signaled the end of the show.

My main complaint about the concert (besides the crowd) is that the band wasn't very tight, and didn't seem too concerned with making the songs sound like the recorded versions. It's early in the tour, however, and after they have played together a few more times they should be a lot tighter. One recommendation: If you have a chance to see the Stones, don't go to one of the big outdoor concerts—they're too much of a hassle. Instead, go to one of the "small" Stones concert—with about 20,000 or less people.

Bill Defels