

## KEITH RICHARDS

Keith Richards is an English guitarist, songwriter, and singer most famous for being a founding member of the Rolling Stones rock band. He is generally considered to be one of the greatest rock guitarists in history. He is also well known as a survivor of decades of illegal drug use.

Richards was born on December 18, 1943, in the town of Dartford in the county of Kent, in southeastern England. His love of music was expressed early in childhood. He sang with a church choir, and he enjoyed listening to American blues and rock 'n' roll records. Some of his favorite musicians were Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, Chuck Berry, and Elvis Presley. He learned to play guitar partly by listening to these records.

In 1961, when Richards was a student at Sidcup Art College in London, he joined a band named Little Boy Blue and the Blues Boys. A singer Richards knew from primary school named Mick Jagger was already in the band. By 1963, Richards and Jagger renamed their band the Rolling Stones, after a Muddy Waters song.

The Rolling Stones released their first album in 1964. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Stones (as most fans called the band) had a long string of hits, including *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* (1965), *Sympathy for the Devil* (1968), *Honky Tonk Women* (1969), *Brown Sugar* (1971), *It's Only Rock and Roll* (1974), and *Miss You* (1978). Richards and Jagger wrote almost all of the Stones' hits together. On most songs, Jagger sang lead vocals while Richards played guitar riffs. Stones' songs on which Richards' raspy voice was featured as the lead include *Happy* (1972), *Before They Make Me Run* (1978), and *Little T&A* (1981).

The Rolling Stones became famous not only for their music, but also for their "bad boy" lifestyles, including drug and alcohol abuse. Richards was arrested several times for drug-related offenses and other infractions, such as fighting with a photographer, reckless driving, and weapons possession. A report of a 1973 arrest listed the following illegal items in his possession: marijuana, cannabis resin, Chinese heroin, mandrax tablets, drug paraphernalia (burnt spoons, syringes, pipes), a loaded handgun and rifle, and 110 rounds of ammunition.

His most serious addiction was to heroin. In 1977, he was arrested in Toronto, Canada, for heroine and cocaine possession and trafficking. Charges against him—which could have resulted in a life sentence in prison—were reduced after he completed "rehab" treatment for his addictions. His drug use continued after his stint in rehab.

In 2006, Richards sustained a serious head injury after falling out of a tree in Fiji, where he was vacationing. As a result of the injury, he underwent brain surgery. He has claimed that he stopped using drugs after this experience.

Both Richards and Jagger occasionally took breaks from the Stones to record solo albums or albums with other groups. Besides playing music, Richards has had minor acting roles in a few movies, including the Johnny Depp films *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (2007) and *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (2011). Richards was reportedly so drunk on the movie set one day in 2006 that the director had to "prop him up" to film his scene.

In Richards' autobiography, *Life*, published in 2010, he described his drug use, his sexual exploits, and his long life as a rock legend. He wrote the following about the reasons for his drug use:

"I never particularly liked being that famous. I could face people easier on the stuff, but I could do that with booze too. It isn't really the whole answer. I also felt I was doing it not to be a 'pop star.' There was something I didn't really like about that end of what I was doing, the blah blah blah. That was very difficult to handle, and I could handle it better on smack. Mick chose flattery, which is very like junk—a departure from reality. I chose junk."

**A. J. Smuskiewicz**