

Exile on Main Street reviews Guess the number of stars

The texts below are customer reviews from Amazon of the new remaster of perhaps the most famous Rolling Stones album. The reviews are organised into groups by how many stars the reviewers gave the album. How many stars do you think each section is (there is one section for each of the five possibilities, one star being the minimum and five the maximum)?

A

Exile On Main St. is a murky, muddy, brilliant album. It sounds like it was recorded at four a.m. after spending a night curled up with a bottle of Jack Daniels or Jim Beam. The band at the time was spiraling down into a pit of drug addiction and complete decadence and the album takes us into that world. The way the album was recorded and produced give us the feeling of despair and dirtiness. The vocals are all down in the mix and it sounds like Mick & Keith are singing underwater at times and other than the horns, the instruments are layered on top of one another with no distinction between them. This doesn't take away from the performances, it only enhances them. The Stones have always been fascinated by and included elements from the music of the American Deep South. Those influences show up all over the album. From the gospel sound of what very well may be their greatest single "Tumbling Dice", the Memphis horns on "Rocks Off" & "Happy", the Mississippi Delta blues of "Torn & Frayed", "Turd On The Run" & "Ventilator Blues", the Alabama dirges of "Loving Cup", "Sweet Virginia", & "Shine A Light" to the electric boogie of "Rip This Joint" & "All Down The Line", the band takes us on a musical tour-de-force. This album is least commercial of any Stones release, but it may well be their best.

This is, quite simply, the best double album in history, and quite possibly the best album ever. The Rolling Stones had been experimenting with various forms of roots music, including gospel, blues, and country, on their previous albums, but here they show themselves to be true masters of these styles. Although the core of the album are the gritty Berry-style tunes, like "Rocks Off" and "All Down the Line," they represent just a small portion of the musical breadth of the album. On "Sweet Virginia" and "Hip Shake," they flash exuberant mastery of the blues, and soar through the gospel on "Just Want to See his Face" and "Let it Loose." There is so much more to the album - the Stones' newfound concentration on group dynamics, the incredible cast of studio talent they tapped, the incredible consistency of all the tracks - that it would be impossible to describe it all here. Just buy it and listen, over and over again, and experience the triumph of a group of wizards playing at their peak. It is a moment like no other in rock history.

B

I can't understand, why so many people regard this as the Rolling Stones' best work. For me, every track is the always same song. Perhaps it's also the problem that it is a mixture of many different styles, but the mix is always the same. The bad endings -nearly every track ends thoughtlessly with fading out- contribute to my bad impression.

Reading these reviews makes me wonder if we bought the same album. I think that this album is one of the worst Stones albums of all time. This sounds like the type of crap that any garage band can throw together in a few weeks. If you love the Stones, stick with Beggars Banquet and Let it Bleed. Save your money and don't buy this wall of noise.

I'm always amazed how much praise is heaped on the Stones for rehashing the same Blues/Rock/Country music formula. While it is true that some great rock bands started with this "Roots Music" formula, they were able to build, expand and eventually create something totally unique. Bands like Led Zeppelin, Cream and Jimi Hendrix were all great Blues bands , but had the talent and imagination to create something original and different from the standard Blues/Rock formula. The Stones, on the other hand, never had the imagination or talent to evolve from their glorified familiar 3-Chord/R&B/Chuck Berry/Country songs. "Exile" is a good little album but it's a perfect example of the Stones inability to grow. Unlike truly great creative band like the Beatles, the Door, the Who and the previously mentioned bands, the Stones are out-classed. Give a listen to any Hendrix, Beatles or Zeppelin album to hear truly groundbreaking and creative work. I like the Stones but I take them for what they are - a good bar band.

C

Rolling Stones from their early days to their present-day parody are fabulous and there isn't an album of theirs unlistenable to this reviewer. Some are better than others and some are untouchable. Having said that, Exile is a grossly overrated album and if I read correctly, Jagger thinks it is too, so I'm not in bad company. The oft noted poor recording quality would be a forgivable flaw if the material stacked up. It doesn't. Tumbling Dice, Happy, Ventilator Blues and Sweet Virginia are very good songs, but four good songs makes an excellent album not. Many of the songs are long-winded and monotonous and their work hints at a burned out aura, which judging by their drug usage at the time is understandable. The sound on this album has a southern honky tonk sort of feel and there are a lot of horns throughout. Horns are great when used in songs like Can You Hear Me Knocking, but this album has no such song. Exile was the next album after Sticky Fingers, an album which is a strong candidate for the best Stones album ever. Of course, how do you follow up an album like that! I've tried to like Exile, but it just doesn't come together, at least in the way many rave over it. What Stones albums are superior? Aftermath, 12x5, Beggar's Banquet and Let It Bleed to name a few. To beginner Stones fans, try the aforementioned albums before buying Exile on Main Street.

D

I bought my first copy of this classic LP about 20 years ago, and after listening to it once, I didn't like it. I spent years fast-forwarding through much of it, as I felt the album contained too much filler and too many throw-aways. After forcing myself to sit through "Exile" during a long road trip, I began to appreciate it more. I have found myself listening to it all the way through more and more, though I like some songs more than others. Until "Some Girls," this was the best Stones LP of the 70s. Its predecessor, "Sticky Fingers," had a few good songs on it, but I always felt that album was incomplete. This one is not only complete, its cup runneth over. The best songs, "Tumbling Dice," "Happy," and "All Down The Line," are greatly complemented by the rest of the tracks. "Sweet Virginia" is a classic, while "Torn and Frayed" is one of the best songs the Stones have, to my knowledge, never played live. The lyrics in "Torn" are great. There are enough tracks on "Exile" to make a great single album, but the Stones must have felt a compulsion to release a double album at the time, much as The Beatles did in 1968 with The White Album. If The Stones had waited a year and substituted some tracks from "Goats Head Soup" and "It's Only Rock and Roll" with some of the throw-aways on "Exile," this album could have become the ultimate Stones album of the 70s. In all, a keeper and one of the 10 best classic rock albums.

E

This is the third version of "Exile..." that I have paid for. The initial double LP version cemented the collection as classic Stones and has yet to be surpassed by them. The second version was Virgin's CD release which was shoddy in it's packaging (but it at least has a jewel box-like case to cover the cheap cardboard cover and it includes miniature versions of the postcards that accompanied the LP release.) Virgin's release remains the best of the lot. This new "remastered" package is notable only because of the newly-released old songs. The songs from the original release are uniformly a second or 2 shorter here than on earlier versions. Since the Stones haven't made music this meaningful in many years, reminders of their former potent rock and roll are welcome reminders of why they were once considered the world's greatest band. That Mick, Keith and company continue to plumb their not insubstantial well of oldies is not entirely a bad thing when gems like those found on disk 2 here become available, but I have paid for this album for the last time. Still, if you can sell a sucker like me the same product 3 times, you've obviously established a bond of some sort with the fan base. I miss the urgent, fascinating band that the Stones once were but I do admire their business instincts

After checking your answers, underline the positive words in the five star review, the negative ones in the one star review, and both in the other two reviews.

Answer key

A- 5 stars

Exile On Main St. is a murky, muddy, brilliant album. It sounds like it was recorded at four a.m. after spending a night curled up with a bottle of Jack Daniels or Jim Beam. The band at the time was spiraling down into a pit of drug addiction and complete decadence and the album takes us into that world. The way the album was recorded and produced give us the feeling of despair and dirtiness. The vocals are all down in the mix and it sounds like Mick & Keith are singing underwater at times and other than the horns, the instruments are layered on top of one another with no distinction between them. This doesn't take away from the performances, it only enhances them. The Stones have always been fascinated by and included elements from the music of the American Deep South. Those influences show up all over the album. From the gospel sound of what very well may be their greatest single "Tumbling Dice", the Memphis horns on "Rocks Off" & "Happy", the Mississippi Delta blues of "Torn & Frayed", "Turd On The Run" & "Ventilator Blues", the Alabama dirges of "Loving Cup", "Sweet Virginia", & "Shine A Light" to the electric boogie of "Rip This Joint" & "All Down The Line", the band takes us on a musical tour-de-force. This album is least commercial of any Stones release, but it may well be their best.

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B- 1 star

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C- 2 stars

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D- 4 stars

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E- 3 stars

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