

July 3, 1999

BRIAN JONES — AN APPRECIATION.

I'm sure that it's in the news and on the radios and TVs out in the world, but in the quiet seclusion of this room, I'm reflecting on this day 30 years ago.

I remember it vividly. Brian Jones died on a Thursday but we didn't hear about it until Friday night. I was with my best friend Ralph (who I named my 1st cat after, even though the cat was female.)

I don't remember whether it was word of mouth or newspaper-I think the former, but when we found out, Ralph and I looked at each other and felt instantly sick. I can recall Ralph's exact words: "Oh my God, Jonesy's dead."

Man, it hit us hard, like a sucker punch to the gut.

It seems that it really was the first major death in rock and roll (I can always check this in 2 sites that list musician's passings, and I will.)

I know Otis Redding died in a plane crash, along with members of his road band The Bar-Kays, in Dec. of 67, but he wasn't really a rock and roller and it didn't really hit me then.

Before them was another plane crash that took the lives of Buddy, Richie, and the Big Bopper. And there was Eddie Cochran and Bobby Fuller, but the "Big 3" were just names, don't know when I heard of 'em , let alone heard their music. Cochran was obscure to me, and Fuller was just a guy with one great hit record.

I'm talking how we felt then, not the revisionist history that puts all these other deaths in their rightful perspective and adds the proper weight of loss.

Brian Jones passing was a landmark. The first of what would be a hideously long list of deaths. In fact-checking the RnR death sites, I see Morrison died 2 years to the day after Brian. And of course, in between, there was Jimi and Janis, and right before Jimi, Alan Wilson of Canned Heat who's death also shocked and saddened me, (I was a huge Canned Heat fan,) and after Morrison, Duane Allman and all the others.

But it all starts with Brian Jones, who we had no idea was no longer a Rolling Stone.

According to more than a few accounts he was the most selfish cruel bastard AND the kindest most thoughtful person rolled into one. Like all of us, he had the angel and the devil in him, but in what seems like greater extremes.

As a musician he seemed to be able to take ANY instrument and make some small bit of beauty emanate from it. As a multi-instrumentalist, he was one of Rock's 1st multi-hyphenates.

He started the Stones, was their leader. He named them, hustled for their gigs, made the girls scream and cry, and, as the years went by, became increasingly less important. They say as soon as Jagger and Richard co-wrote their first song, the balance of power shifted, until finally, Brian became dispensable.

To most of us the Stones WERE and are Mick and Keith, first and foremost, and then there are the other three.

But listen to the songs. They tell the real story. J&R may have written them, but it was Brian who added most of the colors and textures, the subtle-to-obvious touches that really gave them new dimensions and dynamics. The recorder on Ruby Tuesday. The dulcimer on Lady Jane. The slashing slide work on I wanna be your man and Little Red Rooster, which Brian claimed was his very favorite Stones record. And dozens of other examples like the songs with his stellar harmonica playing. Listen to the Stones very first 45-a cover of Chuck Berry's Come on. The hook is provided by Brian's harp.

And the list goes on: various keyboards (piano, organ, vibes, marimba, harpsichord, mellotron). And sitar, flute, autoharp, electronics, saxophone (Brian is the only Stone to play on a Beatles record. He plays sax on their b-side You know my name look up the number. As well as various percussion. etc.

He was also one of the first rockers to be into world music, decades before any of us knew what that was, or it became fashionable or the term was even coined. He loved Morocco and kept returning there. He was enchanted by the music and recorded the Master Musicians of Joujouka. An LP called Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan came out after his death, the first release on the vanity label, Rolling Stones records.

On a non-musical note, they say he was the first man in the western world to wear costume-jewelry. He wore clothes and vivid colors that were more often found on women. In fact, lots of them were from his various girlfriends' collections that melded with his. And he was beautiful. Utterly photogenic.

Many bands would have their blonde Brian look-a-like and some of them were actually hired *because* they looked like Brian.

He didn't live to know about the Woodstock festival which took place the month after his passing. And he didn't know about the crash and burn of the 60s, which was grotesquely typified by the Summer of Manson and the Winter of Altamont. He was spared the horror of being the helpless witness of the Altamont Festival. The other Stones weren't so lucky.

But he did know about the Monterey festival in the "Summer of Love." He was there in the flesh with Nico and captured for posterity on film. He is seen walking around like some exotic Prince with his multi-colored flowing robes and jewelry and beatific (no doubt drug-inspired) smile. And he would introduce Jimi Hendrix.

He was a small sturdy man but at the same time too fragile to linger for too long in this world. The series of drug busts that began in 1967, when the establishment got back at the impudence of youth by targeting the Stones, hit him hardest and devastated him. Many say it was the beginning of the decline. The intensifying of the paranoia that had its realities, but more its delusions. In pictures of this period, he starts to look haggard and world-weary. A man starting to lose his grip.

I forgot to play any of Brian's music on my last show, so I'll catch up and play him on the next one.

And I'll listen to the music again, and again, and remember this musician who was utterly unique and influential and whose many talents made the world a better place-certainly a more beautiful one sonically.

And I'll still feel a twinge, an echo of the pain and sense of loss that my best friend Ralph and I felt on that night thirty years ago today. The loss of someone who we never met, but whose time on earth, although too short, touched us deeply.

-Bob Brainen