

Educator Notes

Adam McEwen: I Think I'm in Love

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Rod Stewart

Rock singer with a taste for excess who found fame with the Faces and fortune as a prolific solo artist

ROD STEWART, who has died aged 57, was the most successful British rock singer of the 1970s, a decade in which he enjoyed 15 Top Ten hits, including six No. 1s in Britain.

His best recordings, such as 'Maggie May' and 'You Wear It Well', showed a rare skill for writing straightforward, catchy songs, brought alive by a hoarse rasp of a voice which conjured up the warmth of a last whiskey in a late-night bar.

With a skinny frame and bony features beneath a mop of bleached hair, Stewart epitomized the fast-living rock star as incorrigible rogue and womanizer. His aspirations were summed up in a couplet from the song 'Every Picture Tells a Story': "She was tall, thin and tarty / And she drove a Maserati."

His musical credibility, such as it was, stemmed from the period 1969-75, when he managed successfully to juggle duties as a solo artist and as frontman with the Faces, the boisterous rock band he formed with guitarist Ron Wood from the ashes of the Small Faces.

Loud, energetic and boozily shambolic, the Faces combined rock and roll with the bouillabaisse of the football terraces. Armed with drugs, alcohol, silk stage suits and an attitude of unbridled lechery, they formed the missing link between heavy rock acts such as Led Zeppelin and the glam rock bands of the early 1970s.

After settling in California in 1975, however, Stewart's career began to slide inexorably toward self-parody. Indulging his tastes for sports cars, pastel dungarees and blonde minor actresses, he seemed to focus on quantity rather than quality, arriving in the late 1970s at such compositions as 'D'Ya Think I'm Sexy'—which was, in typical Stewart style, a huge hit.

"Uncomplicated, politically incorrect and happy with it, in the last two decades Stewart put much of his energy into maintaining his image as the original unreformed 'lad', while continuing to sell millions of records all over the world. Many saw him as a rock dinosaur who had failed to move with the times, but he remained oblivious to the vagaries of opinion. "It's bloody good fun being Rod Stewart", he reasoned. "Well, ninety percent of the time."

Roderick David Stewart was born in Archway, London, on January 10 1945, the youngest of five children. His father was a hard-working Protestant Scot who moved from Edinburgh to London, establishing himself as a builder before opening a newsagents on Archway Road. Young Roderick's abiding passions were football and Al Jolson; having been given a guitar for his 14th birthday, it was above the family shop that he took his first steps in music.

At 17 he signed on as an apprentice with Brentford Football Club, where he lasted three

weeks. He then toured Europe with the folk artist Wizz Jones, but after being deported from Spain for vagrancy he returned to Britain, supporting himself with stints working as a gravedigger at Highgate cemetery. He found work as a session musician, and performed the harmonica solo on Millie Small's hit 'My Boy Lollipop' (1963).

Stewart's musical career took its first significant turn in January 1964, when, three days before his 19th birthday, he was overheard singing blues songs on Twickenham station platform by Long John Baldry, frontman with the Hoochie Coochie Men. The following week Stewart became the group's second singer, claiming with characteristic bluntness that he was only in it for the money.

In 1965 he joined the blues-based Shotgun Express, whose members included Peter Green and Mick Fleetwood (later of Fleetwood Mac); but it was his graduation to the Jeff Beck Group in 1969 that first gave him national exposure, as well as introducing him to guitarist Ronnie Wood, his natural foil and partner in crime.

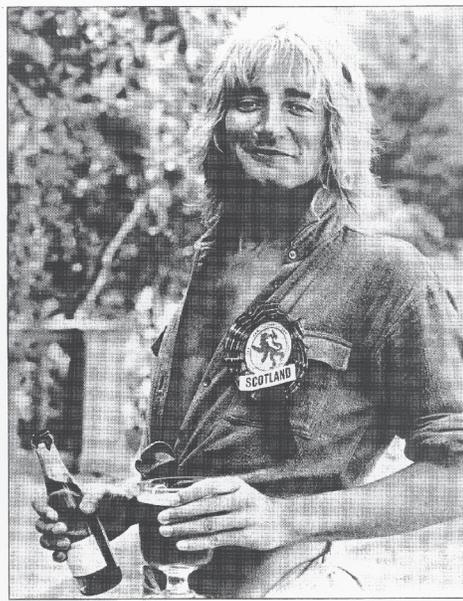
After several grueling tours of America the group disintegrated, and Stewart and Wood left to form the Faces (formerly the Small Faces), with Stewart replacing Steve Marriott as lead singer. Meanwhile, his first solo album, *An Old Raincoat Won't Let You Down*, made it to No 139 in the American charts.

The Faces had begun to gather a devoted following thanks to their live shows and the albums *First Step* (1970) and *Long Player* (1971). But it was Stewart's third solo album, *Every Picture Tells a Story* (1971), which made him a household name. The album reached No 1 in both Britain and America, while 'Maggie May' was a British No 1 and was at the top of the American charts for five weeks.

Partly thanks to Stewart's high profile, the next Faces album *A Face of Good as a Wink... To a Blind Horse* reached the Top Ten on both sides of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, Stewart's fourth solo album, *Never a Dull Moment*, continued his roll, peaking at No 2 in the US and No 1 in Britain.

But success and the excesses of the rock and roll lifestyle were taking their toll, and after touring in 1974 the Faces broke up (Ron Wood went on to join the Rolling Stones). Stewart's album *Smiler* of the same year saw his musical formula wearing thin, and he increasingly looked to America for consolation.

In 1975 he released the album *Atlantic Crossing*, with a hard airbrushed cover depicting the singer bestriding the ocean, rather than soaring from his neck, and setting foot in the land of profit. Trusty English accompanist, as Ron Wood and the guitarist Martin Quittenion, who had helped to put a unique stamp on Stewart's solo work, were



Stewart (1977): football, model railways and a procession of leggy blondes

replaced by the celebrated Muscle Shoals rhythm section and the veteran soul producer Tom Dowd. The album contained the lachrymose single 'Sailing', which became a major hit and the unofficial anthem of the Royal Navy.

By then tax reasons had prompted Stewart to take up residence in Los Angeles, where he began a tempestuous and much-publicised relationship with the actress Britt Ekland, former wife of Peter Sellers.

The good life in California appeared to dissipate Stewart's musical judgement, though not his ability to produce hits, and resulted in such singles as 'Hot Legs', 'Ole Ole' (recorded with the Scottish World Cup Football Squad) and the disco cash-in 'D'Ya Think I'm Sexy', which became No 1 in Britain in 1978. That year the album *Blondes Have More Fun* reached No 3; the next year both single and album were No 1 in America.

By this time Stewart was in full bottle-blonde mode, usually

clothed in baggy silk shirts and leopard skin leggings, and the template for his image was being set for the next decade. During the 1980s he spent his time jet-setting around the world, with the media in constant attendance to record his marriage break-up, his affairs and his entrances and exits from an unending round of parties.

His large and loyal fan base ensured that his records would always find a place in the charts, and he managed to maintain his momentum of successful albums and regular hits. Among these were 'Tonight I'm Yours (Don't Hurt Me)', 'Young Turks' (both 1981), 'Baby Jane', 'What Am I Gonna Do' (both 1983), 'Every Beat of My Heart' (1986), 'Downtown Train' (1990) and 'All For Love' (1994, with Sting and Bryan Adams).

The bulk of Stewart's income, though, came from lucrative tours of America, where he was a perennial favourite at stadium venues across the continent. In 1994 he played to three and a half million people at Copacabana beach, Brazil. By 2001 he had scaled back his commitments following surgery for a cancerous node on his throat.

His considerable fortune went to pay for a taxi-book rock star lifestyle which included his hobbies, football and model trains. He installed an FA Cup Final-quality football pitch in the garden of his manor house in Epping Forest, which he liked to mow himself on a machine costing \$75,000; and in the attic of his house in Beverley Hills he would spend hours poring over a model railway with over 100 feet of track. He had an extensive collection of Pre-Raphaelite art.

The longest-lived of his romances after he split with Ekland in 1977 were with Alana Hamilton (formerly George Hamilton IV's wife), to whom he was married from 1978 until 1984; the model Kelly Embert, his companion from 1983 to 1990; and the model Rachel Hunter, to whom he was married from 1990 until 1999.

He is survived by six children.

About the artist

Adam McEwen was born in London, in 1965, and currently lives and works in New York. He received a BA in English Literature from Christ Church, Oxford, and a BFA from California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA. Recent exhibitions have taken place at: de la Cruz Collection, Miami, MoMA PS1, Whitney Museum of American Art, Museo Civico Diocesano di Santa Maria dei Servi, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Winter Palace and 21er Haus, and the Goss-Michael Foundation. McEwen is the 2016–17 Gabriela and Ramiro Garza Distinguished Artist in Residence.

About the exhibition

New York–based British artist Adam McEwen is known for works that engage viewers with a dark yet poignant sense of humor. Once employed to write obituaries for the London *Daily Telegraph*, McEwen began producing fictional obituaries of living subjects, such as Bill Clinton, Kate Moss, and Jeff Koons. His recent sculptural works include ordinary objects re-presented in unexpected ways such as a life-size coffin-carrier fabricated from solid graphite (*Bier*, 2013) and deployed airbags cast in concrete (a series from 2015). McEwen's Aspen Art Museum exhibition marks the artist's first solo museum show in the United States, and presents a group of works that address the blurred boundary between life and death, reality and fiction, and the everyday and the obscure.

The exhibition's title, *I Think I'm in Love*, also the title of a song by the band Spiritualized, is both optimistic and conveys uncertainty ("I *think*..."). Many of the works in this exhibition push us to step outside of our comfort zone into a space that, although perhaps uncomfortable, allows us to perceive, feel, and think in new ways. By using a sense of humor, the pieces are able to hold together opposing ideas and experiences, and encourage us to embrace that which makes us alive and human.

Questions for discussion

- 1 The artist has said, “I like it when art makes me see the world I think I know in a fresh light.” How does this work make you look at your world in a new way?
- 1 If someone wrote a description of your life, what would you want it to say?
- 1 What happens when you step outside of your comfort zone? What does it feel like?

Suggested activities

Another man's treasure

Many of McEwen's works present familiar objects in a new, unfamiliar way. For example, this exhibition features a yoga mat carved from graphite and photographs of soiled city streets blown up to a large, almost unrecognizable scale. Invite students to have a conversation about what they might like to transform from an everyday object into an artwork.

Take students on a walk, asking them to look for scenes or objects that most people don't take time to notice. Take photographs of these selections on a smart phone or digital camera. Back in the classroom, cover tables with paper and gather pieces of wood or canvas panels, Mod Podge, paintbrushes, sponges, and buckets of water. Print the photographs using a laser jet printer (usually found in offices, using dry ink). Have students cover their photographs with a thick layer of Mod Podge until the image is no longer visible. Ask students to flip the photograph and place it carefully atop the wood or canvas surface, and smooth the back of the photo, removing air bubbles. Leave the image to transfer for twenty-four hours. When the Mod Podge is dry, have students use a wet sponge to moisten the paper back of the photograph and carefully rub the paper off until the image underneath becomes visible. In a group share, ask students to explain how this process transformed the original scene that they photographed.

For more information, please contact the Education Department at 970.925.8050 ext. 133 or email education@aspenartmuseum.org

Following page: Adam McEwen, Untitled, 2013. Inkjet print on cellulose sponge, 79 3/4 x 59 in (202.5 x 149.8 cm). Courtesy the artist and Petzel, New York

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