

Another day, another rock star bio

by *George_Varga*

Keith Richards suffered a life-threatening brain injury when he fell from a palm tree while on vacation last year in Fiji. But fellow Rolling Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood, who witnessed the fall from just a few feet away, devotes barely a paragraph to it in "Ronnie," his new autobiography.

ROCK LEGEND - Ron Wood's biography depicts his life on the road and tells of the drug and alcohol abuse that almost consumed him. CNS Illustration by Manny Franco. "Well, I didn't dabble with Keith in the tree because that's his business and he can address that in his own book. I just happened to be there," Wood said matter-of-factly by phone from New York.

Richards' upcoming memoir was the subject of a bidding war that saw the winning publisher promise a \$7.3 million advance to the grizzled guitarist. His book will have lots of competition for shelf space, although not from Mick Jagger. The Stones singer announced in April that he was shelving his planned autobiography because it was "rather dull" to talk "endlessly about the past."

Such concerns didn't impede the recent autobiographies by Guns N' Roses guitarist Slash, Motley Crue bassist Nikki Sixx, Marianne Faithfull, Eric Clapton and Pattie Boyd, who was married to both Clapton and the late George Harrison and inspired some of the best-known songs by both. ("Clapton" is now No. 2 on the New York Times best-seller list for nonfiction; Sixx's "The Heroin Diaries: A Year in the Life of a Shattered Rock Star" is No. 12.)

Not to be outdone, Wood is already preparing a sequel - or two.

"I do have a few more books ready," he said. "This will suffice for now. If this one is successful, I'll do another."

One rock legend who has yet to pen his own story is Ozzy Osbourne, although more because of lost memory cells than a lack of desire.

"Because of the drugs and alcohol I've been living on for the best part of my adult life, I remember some things, but then ... ," said Osbourne, who has been clean and sober for the past two years.

"I often get asked: 'Is it true you snorted a line of ants?' Knowing me then, there's a very good possibility. But do I remember it? No way."

Ozzy's wife has a better memory. She currently has a best-seller in England with "Sharon Osbourne Survivor: My Story - the Next Chapter: Vol. 2." In this case "survivor" refers to her successful battle with cancer, not her ongoing 25-year marriage to Ozzy, who in 1989 famously failed in his attempt to strangle her. Not to be outdone, the Osbourne's 21-year-old son, rehab veteran Jack, last year wrote his autobiography, "21 Years Gone."

Wood's 358-page tome might more accurately be titled "Really Gone," since he readily admits spending much of the past four decades very, very stoned. This, not coincidentally, is also a recurring theme in the books by Clapton and Boyd (the younger Slash and Sixx are a decade or two behind in their years of drug abuse).

Pot, alcohol, heroin, cocaine - snorted and smoked - Wood did more drinking and drugging than seems humanly possible, yet somehow lived to tell the tale. Or at least to tell it with the help of several ghostwriters.

His many years of drug abuse are such a constant in his book, which was published by St. Martin's Press, that it often overshadows the music he made with The Jeff Beck Group, The Faces and the Stones, which he officially joined in 1976.

Wood, 60, recounting his five years of freebasing cocaine, writes: "It got to the point where I would be on my hands and knees looking for crumbs that might have fallen out of the (crack) pipe. I even banned my children eating meringues in the house after I ended up smoking sugar, believing it to be cocaine."

He also describes an argument over freebasing in which he and Richards attacked each other:

"He barged in, broke the glass bowl of the pipe and came straight at my face. I turned around and punched him in the face and then in the stomach. ... He smashed a bottle and cut me with it. I stormed out and went to find Mick and Charlie, who were working on a song in a room along the corridor. While I stood there bleeding all over the carpet, Mick looked up and asked: 'Have you got any ideas for the middle eight?'"

In a work of fiction or a "This Is Spinal Tap" film sequel, such scenes might be darkly amusing, albeit in a twisted way.

But Wood's nightmarish experiences were real, as evidenced by his alcohol poisoning, his six stays in rehab clinics and his nearly getting fired from the Stones on the eve of the band's 2002 "Forty Licks" tour because he was so out of it. There are so many of these episodes, more than a few near-fatal, that most readers will lose count well before the now sober Wood concludes his book.

"I listened to my body a lot over the years to stop OD'ing," he said. "Seeing people dropping like flies, I learned lessons from that. It is a wonder I'm still alive.

"I know it sounds corny, but I'm still battling from day to day (to stay clean). I think any alcoholic would tell you that ... It's not easy. I still smoke far too many cigarettes and drink loads of coffee. But I learned a lot doing this book; it's very revealing for me to read. I laugh out loud, too. The main thing I'd like is for people reading it to have a laugh."

Wood is apparently not one for much self-reflection.

"Ronnie" also suffers from both poor editing and a glaring absence of fact-checking. Among numerous errors, bassist Stanley Clarke's name is misspelled "Clark" and New Orleans drum great Zigaboo Modeliste is incorrectly cited as having been a member of Booker T. & The MGs.

More egregious still, Wood writes that he was approached in 1968 to lead Robert Plant, John Paul Jones and John Bonham in a new, soon-to-be-very-famous band. This claim will surely surprise Jimmy Page and the other surviving members of the soon-to-reunite Led Zeppelin.

But there is a certain surreal appeal to Wood's "then I did this/then I did that" story, which is bolstered by his apparent inability to be embarrassed. Accordingly, he candidly tells of the several fortunes he's lost, more as the result of horrendously bad business decisions and inept and corrupt managers than his expensive lifestyle. (At one point, he writes, he and his wife spent \$2,000 a week on flowers and nearly \$400,000 a year on a private car service.)

"Well, throughout my life I've just kind of lived six months ahead and earned enough to do that kind of thing," Wood said. "I was on the payroll (as a hired hand) with the Stones for the first 17 years I was in the band. So even though it looked like I was a millionaire, well, I certainly knew how to spend a million."

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