

The shimmering guitar lick is sinister and chilly. The "oooo-oooo" vocals sound as if they're echoing up from hell. And then there's that ratchety, scratchy noise that keeps going round and round, as if someone is tightening up the bolts on the Frankenstein monster's neck.

"Gimme Shelter" starts off *Let It Bleed*, the Rolling Stones' last album of the Sixties, with an apocalyptic air, both in terms of the music and in Mick Jagger's desperate lyrics about storms threatenin', fires sweepin' and war comin'.

For most of its nine-song length, the album continues in that vein, through the devil's comin' funk of "Midnight Rambler," the sleazy sexuality of "Let It Bleed," right up to the grandiose pragmatism of "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

Perhaps that's why some see *Let It Bleed* as the record that heralded the end of the Sixties' peace'n'love vibe. In Britain, "Let It Bleed" even knocked the Beatles' *Abbey Road* out of the No. 1 spot on the charts, a pretty symbolic gesture of darkness smacking lightness right in the mouth.

Taken simply as music, though, *Let It Bleed* is a triumph, the second in the four-album string that most see as the Stones' apex, starting with *Beggar's Banquet* and proceeding through *Let It Bleed*, *Sticky Fingers* and ending with *Exile on Main Street*.

On *Let It Bleed*, the Stones revel in all the styles that made them famous, from the acoustic blues of Robert Johnson's "Love in Vain," to the twang of "Country Honk," the original arrangement of "Honky Tonk Women." From the grinding groove of "Midnight Rambler" to the yin-yang orchestral reach of "Can't Always Get What You Want."

The record also is the last to feature founding member Brian Jones, who played on "You Got the Silver" and "Midnight Rambler," and the first to feature new guitarist Mick Taylor on "Country Honk" and "Live with Me."

As the Sixties wound down, the air of optimism faded. The peaceful air of Woodstock in August 1969 was shot down by the violent death of a spectator at the Stones' Altamont concert in December. Perhaps it's only fitting that the Stones were touring behind *Let It Bleed* at the time.

But the Stones left the decade behind with one of the most prophetic and reassuring philosophies of history:

"You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need."