

# Keith Richards *Talk Is Cheap*

On the Rolling Stones guitarist's solo debut, what Steve Jordan gave him wasn't just impeccable playing—it was a creative jolt at a time when he needed it most.

Fired up by a crack backing combo dubbed the X-Pensive Winos and by his anger over Mick Jagger's decision to put the Stones on the backburner for the second time in three years in order to focus on his solo career, Keith Richards, with his 1988 debut solo album, *Talk Is Cheap*, made the last Rolling Stones-associated project you would dare mention in the same breath as the band's classic work. Richards sounds wickedly inspired here, and it's not far-fetched to assume the chief source of that inspiration was his drummer, Steve Jordan, who coproduced and cowrote the album's eleven songs. Jordan's grooves, unfussy production, and songwriting chops brought focus to Keef's swagger and looseness, lighting a spark that encouraged Richards to stretch out beyond his boogie-and-blues comfort zone, and the results are consistently fantastic.

The trend-chasing Jagger would've killed to bring the kind of funk that Richards and Jordan do on the album-opening "Big Enough." Jordan begins playfully with a

## Hot Stuff

**Turn the beat around.** As if "Big Enough" wasn't funky enough, dig how Jordan flips the groove at the 2:40 mark, a quick four-bar burst that turns this funky song plain nasty on its way out the door.

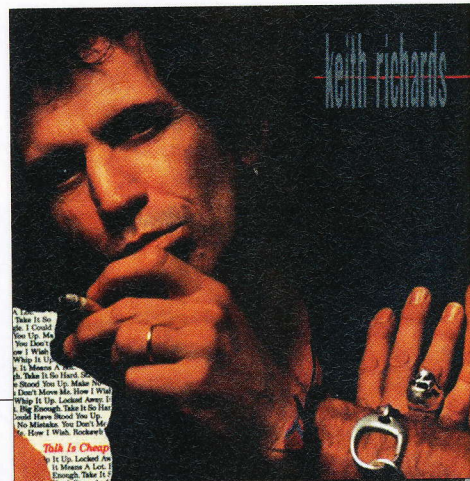
**Role reversal.** It might sound like Jordan playing drums on the single "Take It So Hard," what with the cracking snare and insistent pulse. But it's actually bassist Charley Drayton laying down that slamming take. Jordan plays bass on this one and does a damn fine Bill Wyman impersonation by getting in some melodic licks during the ending jam.

**Cool sounds.** At a time when even the Stones were falling prey to the over-processed drum sounds of the day (see 1986's *Dirty Work*), Jordan emphasizes rustic tones on *Talk Is Cheap*. Snares buzz, brushes keep time on close-miked, muffled snare drums, and on the beautiful "Locked Away," Jordan offers quiet accompaniment on hi-hats, kick, and a deep-tuned rack tom.

snare crack on the "&" before 1, which leads into two bars of a pounding groove that features the bass drum on 1, 2, 3, and the "a" before 4. Then he falls naturally into a kick/snare/floor tom beat that dances with a slippery bass line from James Brown/Parliament-Funkadelic legend Bootsy Collins and anchors a sweet sax solo by another JB heavy, Maceo Parker. And you can be sure Mick would've loved a shot at singing "Make No Mistake," a steamy soul number that features the Memphis Horns and finds Jordan in full-on Al Jackson—at-Hi Records mode, bringing the 2 and 4 on a deep, fat snare and filling out the rhythm with a conga part lifted straight from the Al Green playbook.

Jagger was likely less enthused by "You Don't Move Me," Richards' scathing indictment of his longtime musical partner in the Stones. Jordan's simple pattern—straight fours on the kick underneath a taut rhythm tapped out on a muffled high-pitched snare and hi-hats—gives the stripped-down rocker a raw, harsh edge. The snare and hat accents weave through the hard-panned electric and acoustic guitars, while shakers rattle in the background; you can imagine Richards' demo for "Street Fighting Man" sounding similarly spare, loose, and ominous.

While Jordan's involvement spurs Richards to think beyond his roots, the guitarist certainly doesn't abandon them. One of the record's high points is the boogie-woogie shuffle "I Could Have Stood You Up," where Jordan shakes, rattles, and rolls like he's backing up Chuck Berry circa 1957. His swinging right hand alternates between ride cymbal and rim, as he sits in the pocket while NRBQ bassist Joey Spampinato and Berry's piano player, Johnnie Johnson, do the walking (and former Stone Mick Taylor's guitar does some talking). Steve's choice of fills is perfect here—tumbling rolls on the snare and rack tom after the choruses and a series of staccato snare hits that alternately answer and accent Richards' lyrics. The



## Talk Is Cheap (1988)

Big Enough • Take It So Hard • Struggle  
• I Could Have Stood You Up • Make No Mistake • You Don't Move Me • How I Wish • Rockawhile • Whip It Up • Locked Away • It Means a Lot

**Keith Richards:** guitar, vocals

**Steve Jordan:** drums, bass, guitar, vocals

**Charley Drayton:** bass, drums, vocals

**Ivan Neville:** keyboards

**Waddy Wachtel:** guitar

Plus guest musicians

Produced by Keith Richards and Steve Jordan

drums are right up front in the mix, so when Jordan smacks out those snare accents, you feel it.

Of course *Talk Is Cheap* has plenty of Stones-y moments. It is Keith, after all; it would sound like the Stones if he was playing a lute through an oscillating fan. And Jordan doesn't stray much from the classic blueprint on these songs, making straight time swing like Charlie Watts, albeit with his own unmistakable attack that's slightly more on top of the beat than Charlie is. Jordan's solid 4/4 pushes the jittery "Struggle," which features a tasty flurry of fills (notably the sweet combinations between the snare and high-pitched rack tom) that don't disturb the groove even a little bit. On the riff-based "Whip It Up" and "How I Wish," Jordan and X-Pensive Winos bassist Charley Drayton carve out their pocket in the spaces between Richards' slashing chords.

Keith Richards hasn't played with many drummers over the course of his iconic career. And there's a reason for that. The ones he's worked with most, Watts and Jordan, give him exactly what he needs.

**Patrick Berkery**