

The 20 Greatest Songs

From wired rockers to mournful ballads, from Stones classics to obscure solo gems – a definitive guide to Keith's finest moments

**Let It
Loose**

At Sunset Sound
studio in Los
Angeles, 1972





I Need a Love

Richards later said he recorded "Happy" in "one grand bash."

No. 1 Happy

Exile on Main Street, 1972

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ROUND noon one day in the basement of Nellcôte, the house in the South of France where the Rolling Stones were recording *Exile on Main Street*, Keith Richards, saxophonist Bobby Keys and producer Jimmy Miller were waiting for the rest of the band to arrive when Keith ripped into a riff he'd been working on that morning. Soon, Miller was behind the drums and Keys was on baritone sax, and the tape was rolling. "It was no Rolling Stones record," Richards said. "[Even though] it's

got the name on it." The result was a raucous three-minute dose of stomping barroom blues and soul-revue firework swagger. Richards made up the lyrics – about looking for love when you're down-and-out – while shouting into the mic. "It just came, tripping off the tongue... I've spent the fucking money and I have none left, and it's nighttime and I'm looking to have a good time, but I ain't got shit," he explained in his memoir, *Life*. Richards credits the song's framework on his late-Sixties discovery of open-G tuning, which is normally used for slide guitar. To sharpen his sound, he had also recently stripped his guitar from six strings to five. "You change one string, and suddenly you've got a whole new universe under your fingers," he wrote. "I was starting to really fix my trademark." The basic track was written and recorded in about four hours. After the initial take, Richards played the bass part himself, and additional horns and Jagger's backup vocals were also overdubbed. "I love it when they drip off the end of the fingers," Richards told *ROLLING STONE* in 2002. "And I was pretty happy about it. Which is why it ended up being called 'Happy.'"