

Jagger damns Chinese with faint praise for banning songs

Jonathan Watts in Shanghai
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Mick Jagger heaped sarcastic praise on China's censors yesterday as it emerged that another of the Rolling Stones' songs has been banned ahead of their first concert in the world's most populous country.

Start Me Up has been added to the four tracks previously deemed unacceptable by the authorities, apparently because Chinese communist censors have followed the lead of their American Christian counterparts.

US officials beeped over the sexually suggestive lyrics "You make a dead man come" while Jagger was singing the song at this year's Superbowl.

Speaking at a press conference on the eve of the gig, Jagger noted the irony in the authorities protection of this privileged audience, expected to be made up mainly of foreigners.

"This time we hoped there would be no censorship, but they have kept the same four and added another one," he said. "I'm pleased the ministry of culture is doing so much to protect the morals of expatriate bankers and their girlfriends."

Start Me Up now joins four others from the Forty Licks album - Honky Tonk Woman, Black Sugar, Let's Spend the Night Together and Beast of Burden - on the don't playlist for tomorrow's concert at Shanghai's Grand Stage. The band said they accepted the restrictions as the price to pay for a concert that has taken years to organise.

During the 1966-76 cultural revolution, the Rolling Stones were considered a symbol of decadent capitalism. Even when politics was no longer a major obstacle, nature has intervened. The band agreed not to play the contentious four songs at a gig arranged in 2003, but it had to be cancelled because of the Sars crisis.

This time, with ticket prices equivalent to several months of the average annual wage in China, more than 80% of the crowd at the 8,000 venue are expected to be foreigners.

Keith Richards, the lead guitarist, joked that the band might still play an instrumental version of the banned songs "to give Mick a break".

Richards, Jagger, Charlie Watts and Ronnie Wood will get more exposure than most bands who come to China. According to the organisers, the concert will be the first show by a foreign band to be relayed live by CCTV - the Chinese state broadcaster.

"I feel like Marco Polo," said Richards.

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