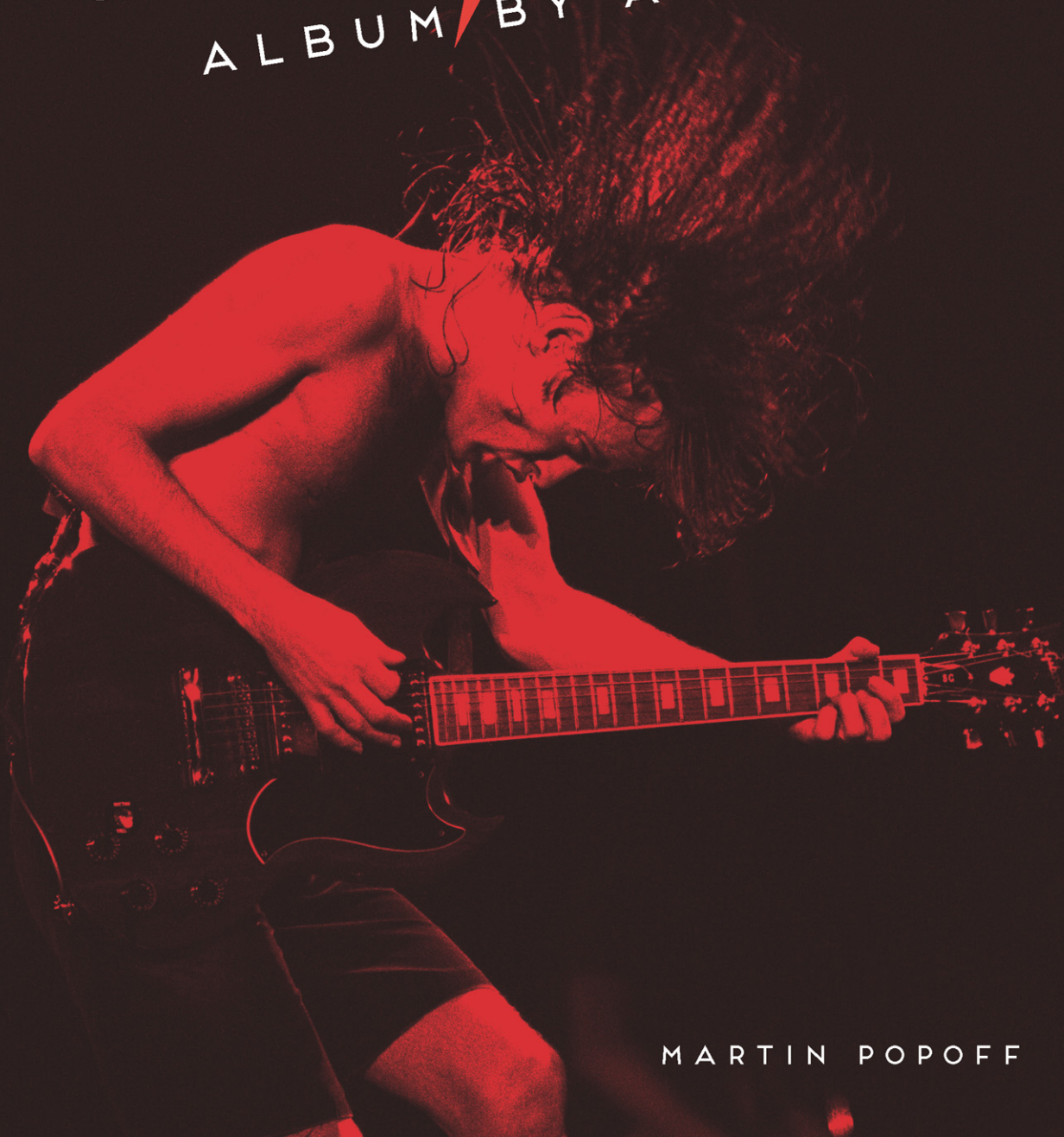


AC/DC

ALBUM BY ALBUM



MARTIN POPOFF





AC/DC

ALBUM BY ALBUM

BY MARTIN POPOFF

WITH

RICHARD BIENSTOCK, PHIL CARSON,
MARK CICHINI, RICH DAVENPORT,
DAVE ELLEFSON, MIKE FRASER,
JAY JAY FRENCH, MICHAEL HANNON,
PAUL KEHAYAS, ROBERT LAWSON,
JOEL O'KEEFFE, PHIL RUDD,
ROBERT SIBONY, MARK STRIGL,
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AND SIMON WRIGHT





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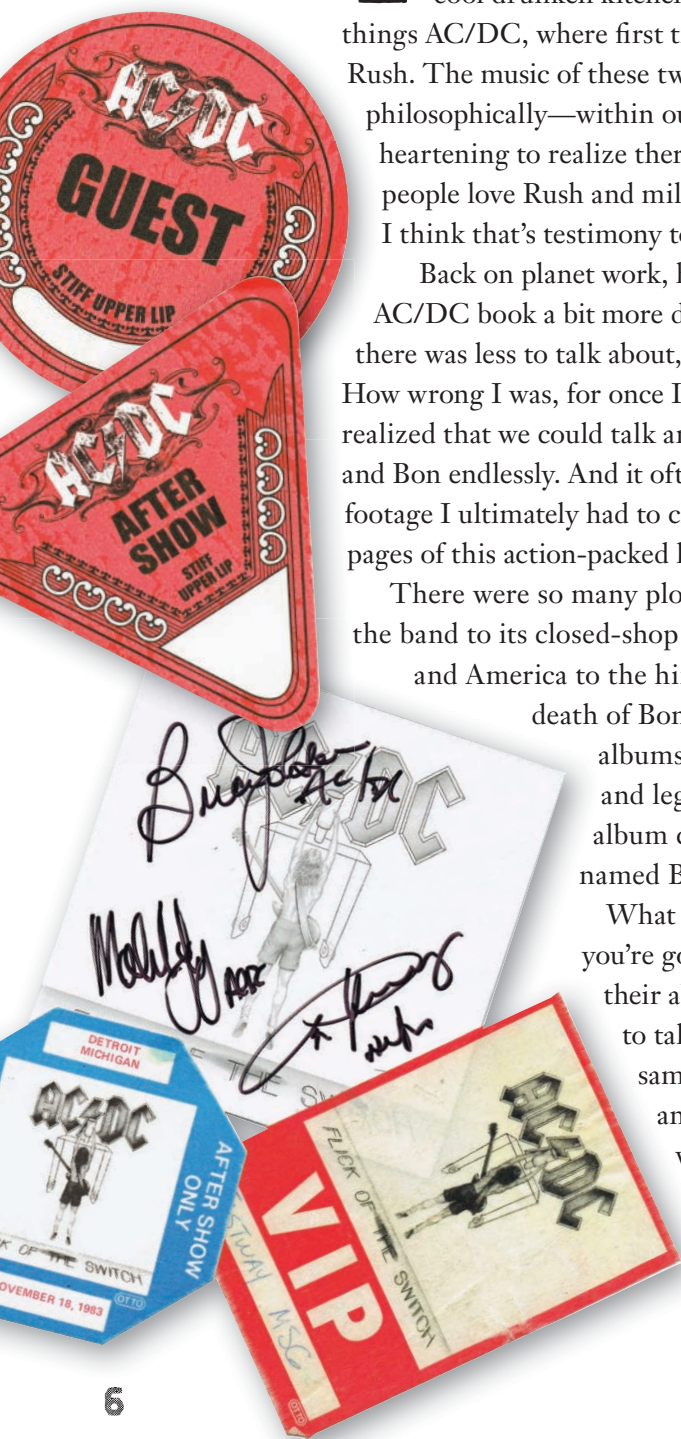
INTRODUCTION

There's something amusing about the second book I've done in this cool drunken kitchen party *Album by Album* series being about all things AC/DC, where first time out, the subject was fussy math rock pioneers Rush. The music of these two legendary bands couldn't be further apart philosophically—within our classic hard rock bubble, anyway—but it's heartening to realize there's a huge overlap in the fan bases. Millions of people love Rush and millions of those same people love AC/DC too. I think that's testimony to the fuzzy lovability of both bands.

Back on planet work, however, I found the prospect of constructing the AC/DC book a bit more daunting, given that, at first blush, it seemed like there was less to talk about, certainly fewer nooks and crannies to the music. How wrong I was, for once I gathered my army of AC/DC experts, I quickly realized that we could talk and shout and laugh about Angus, Malcolm, Brian, and Bon endlessly. And it often seemed like we did, given how much interview footage I ultimately had to choose from and could not stuff between the pages of this action-packed love letter to Australia's greatest export.

There were so many plots and subplots, from the weird formation of the band to its closed-shop ethic, from the inevitable assault on Europe and America to the hiring of new producers, from the shocking death of Bon Scott straight into one of the biggest selling albums of all time, leading to a level of fame, infamy, and legendary status very much anchored in that first album crowed and cawed by an unknown Geordie named Brian Johnson.

What I love about this book, and the reason I think you're gonna dig it, is the enthusiasm of the speakers and their ability to convince us that there is indeed a lot to talk about with this band famous for "making the same record over and over again." At the massive and commercial end of the catalog, their words will have you revisiting records you thought you knew top to bottom. More intriguingly, their instruction and exposition will bring you new appreciation for albums to which you might've



paid cursory notice and then forgotten, like *Powerage*, *Fly on the Wall*, *Ballbreaker*, *Stiff Upper Lip*, and their likely last release, *Rock or Bust*.

That's really what I love the most about this series: this delivery of an enriched and educated viewpoint, not only from us to you, but also from these guys to me in real time as I wrote it. I had all manner of things pointed out to me that I never would've considered as I talked to these cats. And as soon as the interview was over, out came the CDs, finger on the fast forward or rewind buttons, in search of a fresh revelation about what Angus does at the twenty-eight-second mark.

So there you go. This AC/DC fan (who was introduced to the band in 1977 with a domestic Canadian copy of bought at Kelly's in Winnipeg, Manitoba, while on a cross-country family vacation) . . . well, I found myself plowing through the catalog yet again, which has never really been an issue, because I've always been a regular listener of this band. After all, I'd say pretty much unarguably that AC/DC has got to be one of the top handful of goodtime party bands ever concocted. Whether it's drinking, socializing, jogging, gyming, driving fast, or just at those thorny times when a pick-me-up or attitude adjustment is called for, nothing slakes one's thirst like *Powerage* or *Highway to Hell*.

So pour yourself a stiff one, and come on in. Step on up and clink drinks with seventeen—eighteen, if you count this author—dedicated fanatics just like yourself, each with his own story about when he first stuck his finger in that socket (yes, there are no gals—though oh how we tried to find some). Don't be shy; join in the debate—while writing this, I could almost hear you pounding your fist on the bar, either in agreement or spoiling for a fight. Here's hoping that out in the pubs and clubs I get to hear from you which of these guys you thought was full of crap and which seemed to be reading your very thoughts, confirming what you were sure that you alone understood about those mysterious Young brothers and the happy and healing headbanging they conjured.

—Martin Popoff



CHAPTER



ISSUE VARIANCE NOTES: Issued only in Australia. Not to be confused with international versions of *High Voltage*, although "She's Got Balls" and "Little Lover" would be included on those records.

SIDE 1

1. Baby Please Don't Go 4:50
2. She's Got Balls 4:51
3. Little Lover 5:37
4. Stick Around 4:40

SIDE 2

1. Soul Stripper 6:25
2. You Ain't Got a Hold on Me 3:31
3. Love Song 5:15
4. Show Business 4:46

All songs composed by Angus Young, Malcolm Young, and Bon Scott except "Baby Please Don't Go" (Big Joe Williams) and "Soul Stripper" (Angus Young and Malcolm Young)

Personnel: Bon Scott—lead vocals; Angus Young—lead guitar; Malcolm Young—rhythm guitar, lead guitar, bass, backing vocals; Rob Bailey—bass (in band but limited playing on album); Peter Clack—drums (in band but performs on "Baby Please Don't Go" only). **Session appearances:** George Young—bass, rhythm guitar, backing vocals; Harry Vanda—backing vocals; Tony Currenti—drums (session drummer but plays on all tracks except "Baby Please Don't Go")

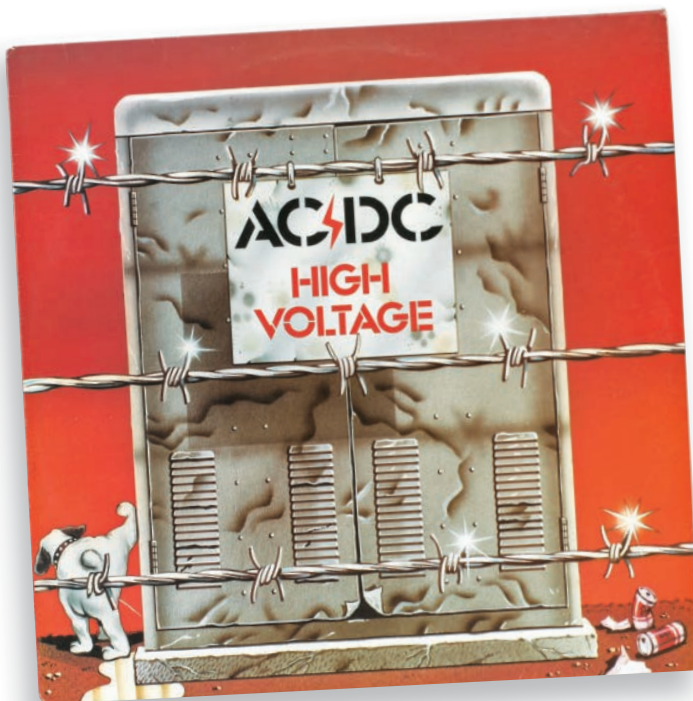
Released February 17, 1975

Recorded at Albert Studios, Sydney, Australia

Produced by Harry Vanda and George Young

HIGH VOLTAGE

with **RICH DAVENPORT** and **ROBERT SIBONY**



Did the most loved band in the whole darn world ever hafta pay their dues? I'd say the answer is yes. Fact is, when AC/DC ambled onto the Australian scene in February 1975, clutching their mom-approved debut album, *High Voltage*, they had only been a band for a little over a year, with their new lead singer Bon Scott joining a mere month before the album's taping in October 1974.

But there was quite a bit in place already. Older brother and co-producer George Young had already been a pop sensation with his band the Easybeats, which he shared with Harry Vanda, who came along and co-produced *High Voltage* with George. As well, George was already in tight with Ted Albert from the decades-old music industry Albert family, and so a record deal was soon in the offing, along with the opportunity to record in a new state-of-the-art studio.

The end result of having these ducks in a row was a slight and scrappy record that most AC/DC fans throughout the ensuing decades knew little about, outside of two tracks, “She’s Got Balls” and “Little Lover,” which would be included on the international debut record for AC/DC, also confusingly called *High Voltage*.

It’s for good business reason the voltage was kept low, with most of these songs evading wide release. And it’s not that the record’s collaborative contributions were objectively bad. It’s just that what would become one of the most identifiable sounds in rock was still in its formative stages, if fairly moved along with “She’s Got Balls,” “Stick Around,” “Soul Stripper,” and, if you’ll buy into bald-faced boogie as part of AC/DC’s later identity, “Show Business.”

As Malcolm told me in a hotel room interview (the day after the band’s historic 2003 SARSstock concert in Toronto, alongside Rush and the Rolling Stones), there was a clear reason the band played songs such as “Show Business” and “Baby Please Don’t Go.” “The kids were just like that on the pub scene,” he explained. “Some of these pubs hold fifteen hundred, two thousand, and they wanna rock out there. And the boogies, they could understand those straight enough. . . . It was like, ‘Give us a boogie! Give us a boogie!’ So everyone

OPPOSITE: The Australia-only *High Voltage*.

BELOW: The Australia-only release of *High Voltage* was a slight but scrappy record, helped along by the co-production of the experienced George Young and Harry Vanda.



played a boogie. You know, we used to like Canned Heat from way back, and we would just jam on stuff, around their ideas at the time, and we'd put a bit of boogie into our own material. But we were always into the blues and the rock 'n' roll stuff. We grew up on it. We had older brothers who were into Chuck Berry and Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis and we grew up as kids hearing that. You know, it's in us. And we just tried to emulate that, these guys, with their feels, and get it really rockin' and then keep it going."

Additional to its deliberate roots rock premise, the whole of the *High Voltage* album was expertly recorded and solidly played, the team making deft use of the studio's top-notch equipment and Harry's and George's production know-how. But even these somewhat advanced songs were AC/DC Lite, somewhat average, filler if one must be harsh. Elsewhere we got a frantic version of "Baby Please Don't Go," very much in the Ted Nugent and the Amboy Dukes vein. "You Ain't Got a Hold on Me" is another song one might arguably add to the bank of tracks comprising the roots of AC/DC proper. And, sure, "Little Lover" aligns with "The Jack" and "Night Prowler." But gosh darn right off the path is "Love Song," which is as close to a ballad as the band would ever get, offering amusing glimpses at the pasts of both George and Bon, the two seasoned elders.

It's almost as if George and Harry and Malcolm were grasping for something specific, something that didn't exist, a sonic worldview that kept flashing by just outside their peripheries. Eagerly and enthusiastically, and through sweat and ambition, they would be rewarded for their efforts. Soon they would have more than enough incendiary punk-but-not-punk songs to present when the possibility of an international label deal became real. Ergo, there goes almost all of *High Voltage*, not into the vaults, although in the pre-Internet information age, they may well have. *Jailbreak '74* would remedy some of that, as would the *Backtracks* box set of 2009, but as history stacked up, *High Voltage* remained the red-headed stepchild of the catalog, the shot heard only Down Under, foretelling a rock 'n' roll thunder that would soon shake the planet.

POPOFF: To start with, AC/DC actually had quite a bit going for them right off the bat. This wasn't just a bunch of kids banging around and putting out an indie record. They had producers, a label, a great studio to work in, even roadies and a tour bus.

SIBONY: No, you're right, and it all starts with George Young, the older brother of Angus and Malcolm, who was with the Easybeats, who were a pretty big band in the mid-sixties, influencing guys like Bruce Springsteen

and David Bowie, believe it or not. So he and Harry Vanda, who was Dutch, had that band together coming up in the immigrant experience in Australia, with another Dutch guy, and George, whose family had recently arrived from Scotland, and even a drummer from Liverpool, Snowy Fleet. And they produced a lot of stuff and actually wrote and produced that big hit, “Love Is in the Air.”

Anyway, what happened with Vanda and Young, as a production team they went to Europe and were in England for a few years. J. Albert & Son was a big music store in Australia and Ted Albert was one of the young guys, and he wanted to get into rock and start producing. His great granddad had this music store, which opened in 1902, which started after they moved to Sydney from Switzerland in 1884, and started off fixing watches and clocks. And it’s a major music store. I mean, we’re talking, classical . . . they made pianos, giant organs. And they sold music too, records, and they got into publishing and radio broadcasting and eventually owned a bunch of radio stations.

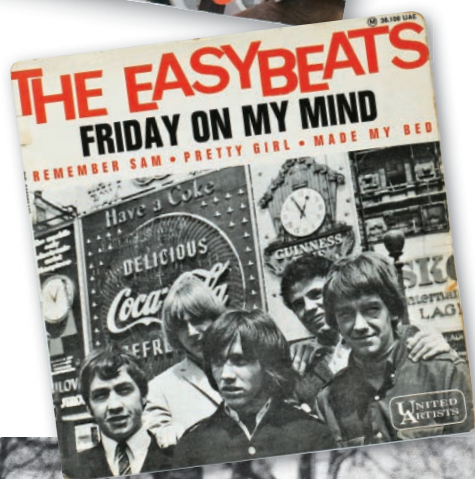
In 1973, they built a state-of-the-art studio in this place called Boomerang House, which is a house owned by the Albert family. And that begins the association with Young and Albert. And the early AC/DC records were produced under Albert Productions and EMI Australia. Ted Albert did that to lure back Vanda and Young, back to Australia. And he basically made them an offer they couldn’t refuse. So they went there, and they were basically staff writers and producers for Albert Productions.

And, you know how it started? They were, of course, friends of Ted’s, and Ted came over to the house one day to meet George about something, and, of course, the two kids, Angus and Malcolm, are downstairs playing in the basement, and Ted says to their father, “If they ever want to do something, call me.” So that was the beginning of it. So you’re right, they were in a pretty established place, here with Ted, who was basically the outcast of the family, going into rock ’n’ roll. But that’s how it all started.

POPOFF: And why, given Australia’s pop sound—much of it at the hands of George and Harry—does this new band have this sort of slightly post-fifties rock ’n’ roll vibe?



Pre-Bon, pre-Phil, and pre-Mark . . . Chequers, Sydney, early 1974.



DAVENPORT: Yeah, well, Australia was a little bit like catching up musically in the sixties, but they did get there. Obviously, the first major band was the Easybeats, with George Young on guitar. And Angus and Malcolm obviously looked up to him as their older brother, not only musically, but I think the way they conducted the business of the band. George's outlook on the music business was that they were severely ripped off when they were in the Easybeats. So his experience shaped the brothers' outlook on the business.

But back to the sound, in terms of early seventies, the Australian pop rock and pub scene was coming into its own. Now, it was different from English pub rock; that was a disparate scene with everything from sort of country rock with Brinsley Schwarz to more bluesy bands with Dr. Feelgood, whereas the Australian pub rock sound was much harder-edged and a lot more bluesy. You had guys like Lobby Loyde,

The Easybeats, seen here in London in 1968, featuring Malcolm's and Angus's older brother George (far left) on guitar, were one of Australia's first major bands. Malcolm and Angus obviously looked up to him not only musically, but for the way he conducted band business.



who had a band called the Coloured Balls, and Buffalo—they were a heavy band—that featured Pete Wells from Rose Tattoo on bass. Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs were a sixties band, and then they re-emerged in the early seventies; they were very influential. And, obviously, pre-AC/DC and Rose Tattoo, Buster Brown, for Phil Rudd and Angry Anderson.

So the sound is very hard-edged, and they were playing these huge “hotels,” they called them, but they were like a big pub room, a much bigger room than you would get in an English pub. These were like spit and sawdust places where you had to really impress the crowd and knock them out with rock ‘n’ roll. That’s what we want. So that environment was a big part of shaping that sound.

Now the band really was inspired by a lot of straight-ahead rock ‘n’ roll: the Stones, Free, Rod Stewart, a lot of blues stuff, Little Richard, that kind of thing. So they’ve got that rock ‘n’ roll sound there. But the key to them developing their sound was George. Various people who were in the studio for the first album have all pointed to the fact that George was guiding them and getting them to cut the fat off any of the riffs and songs and just chop them down to the essentials.

Malcolm’s guitar sound was pretty much half the band, and you can hear a Stones influence in there. But I think he was influenced by George as well, his style of playing, in terms of stripping the songs down. Not to say that George did everything, but he was very instrumental in getting them to strip off the extraneous bits. And if they came up with anything that didn’t sound like what they had done before, he’d say, no, stick to what you’re good at.

POPOFF: *High Voltage* was produced by both Harry and George.

What was Harry’s role?

DAVENPORT: That’s a tough one. I know that they were very, very close, because they were in the Easybeats together. From what I’ve read of the Angels and Rose Tattoo, it’s always Harry and George, and Harry did that and George did that. With AC/DC, it tends to be more George being hands-on, possibly because of the familial relationship as the older brother. But AC/DC don’t tend to mention Harry as much, to be frank, and I don’t know why that is.

POPOFF: Whoever was responsible for what, they sure managed a good production sound, especially when it came to the guitars.

(continued on page 16)





Victoria Park, Sydney, 1974.

(continued from page 13)

SIBONY: Yes, and you can hear that loud and clear on both the soloing and the riffs on “Soul Stripper” and “She’s Got Balls,” where Angus is already as good as we’d know him for later—he’s absolutely already the iconic lead guitarist we know him as today, at twenty years old, especially on “She’s Got Balls.”

And how these guys produced, and how they did guitars, was amazing. They went around to all the clubs in Australia, looking for bands. They listened to some of the records these bands made and when they went to see them live, it was like, this is not the same band. They didn’t capture it. So the great thing about George and Harry was that they were both guitarists for the Easybeats, and the songwriters, so they used that knowledge to establish that live guitar sound of AC/DC and get it onto a record. Even today that guitar sound still stands out—you can still use that guitar sound today. You know how hard it is to capture energy in the studio? Well, they did it with AC/DC; you could feel it off the records.

Harry was the lead guitarist in the Easybeats—he was the Angus to Malcolm, right? And he was pretty schooled in music and the two of them made a great songwriting team. They were two young kids, eighteen years old, who were in Australia as immigrants who hung out in the sort of migrant camps they had and started doing music. And their parents were very supportive too—remember, George was a major rock star before AC/DC. The whole family played. There were eight brothers and sisters. Even Alex, the older brother, fifteen years older than Malcolm, played on some of the records that Vanda and George produced. So everybody thinks AC/DC was just a garage band that luckily hit it big. But it’s not like that. They were very well schooled in music and of course in the music business because the brother had already gone through it and was already a major star already in 1966 with “Friday on My Mind.”

POPOFF: What have you ever heard about what the atmosphere was like in Albert Studios?

DAVENPORT: Well, everybody who I’ve either interviewed—and I’ve spoken to the guys from the Angels and I’ve read interviews with Angry Anderson and stuff with the guys from AC/DC—they all point to George and Harry as being a very efficient production team, very hands-on, quite driven. I’ve never read anybody criticize them and say that it was terrible, that they really overworked us. Mark Evans mentions that they were all about capturing the performance. The band would play pretty much live, with some overdubs. And the story about Angus’s amplifier catching on fire, on



The band poses for *High Voltage* promo stills in the studio of photographer Philip Morris.

one of the tracks on *Let There Be Rock*, Mark mentions if you listen to “Hell Ain’t a Bad Place to Be,” if you’re a stickler for tuning, the guitars were slightly out of tune on that, but they just went with the performance. George and Harry said, no, you’ve got that, you got the feel there, let’s leave it.

POPOFF: And what was the studio itself like?

DAVENPORT: It was big enough for the band to set up live in the room, but I don’t think it was a huge room. Mark Evans mentions that he and Angus and Malcolm would be in one room, and then there was a door taken off another room, so you can see through to Phil in the next room. And then they would work on the backing tracks, and Bon would work on his vocals over the top. They’d kind of literally taken the door off the hinges so they could see through, and from what I understand, they would just play through a back line of amps and pretty much go for it live.

POPOFF: How does *High Voltage* balance the traditional while suggesting something new?

SIBONY: That whole record, they take really common guitar licks and they just change them slightly to make it their own, mainly by adding bit more melody and offering modern chord changes. They had this magic of doing that. George made them realize that it’s all about the hook, and even the guitar line had to be a hook. It’s not only about the vocals, but it’s about the guitar too, which also had to pull its weight and provide a hook.

POPOFF: There’s a bit of mystery about who plays what on *High Voltage*. Can you sort that out a bit for us?

DAVENPORT: On drums is a guy named Tony Currenti, who runs a pizzeria in Sydney. And he moved from Italy to Australia in the late sixties. At the time, AC/DC had Bon on vocals. He had not long since joined. He’d been with the band a few months. And they had a guy named Rob Bailey on bass, and another drummer named Peter Clack.

Now, what happened, when I interviewed Tony, was that he said that he knew Vanda and Young. He had been in the studio working on a session with Jackie Christian & Flight, the band that he was in, and they said, “Look, can you stay behind?” They obviously liked his drumming. Tony was saying that they told him that Peter Clack had taken an inordinate amount of time to try to lay down a drum track and they wanted to move on quite quickly and get things done.

So Tony said that at the time he came in, “Baby Please Don’t Go” was recorded, and that was with Peter Clack. But the rest of the tracks that were on *High Voltage* were Tony on drums. And he said that they recorded eight songs over four nights. He already knew Bon Scott, because he had been in a band a few years previously, in the early seventies, when Bon was in Fraternity, and sort of got quite friendly with Bon, and they had a chat and a drink together at the bar.

And George Young brought Tony into the recording studio session, and when he opened the door to the studio, he recognized Bon. And he said that that was really good at making him feel at home and comfortable, and Bon was making him feel welcome, making him a cup of tea [laughs]. That helped him settle in and get cracking with it, really. He also said that the first night it was Rob Bailey playing bass, and then the next three nights were all George Young. So quite a lot of the bass lines were actually played by George on that first album.

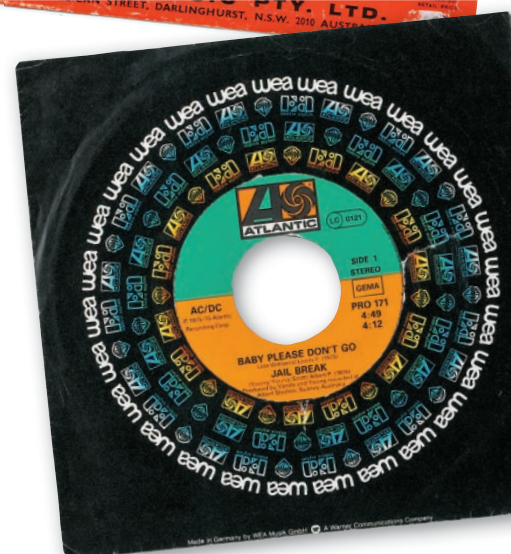
POPOFF: What would make them cover “Baby Please Don’t Go”?

DAVENPORT: It makes a lot of sense. I know they are blues fans. Now, obviously, I don’t know this, but I have a feeling that they were fans of Them, Van Morrison’s very raw R & B band. Because, no disrespect to AC/DC, but the riff for “Jailbreak” is very, very close to “Gloria” by Them. And there are very few AC/DC songs where you could say, oh, that sounds like another riff. But that is one of them. The other one I would think of, offhand, is “Beating Around the Bush,” which was like a speeded-up version of “Oh Well” by Fleetwood Mac. And “Ride On,” which has a similarity to “Jesus Just Left Chicago” by ZZ Top.

Other than that, obviously, there’s twelve bars that sound like Chuck Berry, but it’s their version of “Baby Please Don’t Go” that shows their boogie roots, tied in with the blues roots. And they maybe had heard the Van Morrison version before, I figure. If you listen to the original Muddy Waters version, it’s about half the speed, and Them give it a fair kick up the bum and speed it up, and then AC/DC did it a shade faster than that.

BELOW: Sheet music for “Baby Please Don’t Go,” 1975. Was their cover of the Big Joe Williams chestnut inspired by Van Morrison’s Them?

BOTTOM: Three-track German promo, 1975. “Baby Please Don’t Go” and “Jail Break” [sic] b/w “Soul Stripper.”





They put their own stamp on it, it's like an ascending chord sequence in the middle, and there's like a question and response with Bon and Angus on guitar. And there's a kind of a trademark thing at the beginning, the riff that people associate with "Baby Please Don't Go"—Angus and Malcolm play in octaves. Malcolm plays the low octave and Angus plays the high octave, and he would occasionally do that on riffs throughout the career. Bon's ex-wife Irene told me that Bon told her second husband they were planning to record a cover of "Gloria" as a B-side, when they met! This was around *Highway to Hell*.



"A complete anomaly."
"Love Song (Oh Jene)"
was AC/DC's first official
single with Bon. The
B-side, "Baby Please
Don't Go," is what radio
stations ended up playing.

POPOFF: But other bands helped establish and then push the mandate, correct?

DAVENPORT: Yes, and actually, "She's Got Balls" is probably one of the first songs that has that relentless driving riff style. So on that original Australian *High Voltage*, the bare ingredients of AC/DC are there, although some of the songs, for me, don't have quite the attack that the later material has, and that would be placed firmly into *T.N.T.* I mean, "Stick Around," good song, but it doesn't quite kick in as much as they do on some of the later stuff.

And "Little Lover" is quite slow. You've got things like "Love Song," which is really different for AC/DC, a complete anomaly, because it's quite intricate and fiddly, and it starts with triplets and arpeggios and things like that. I would imagine that's the kind of thing that George Young would've guided them away from. Also, lyrically, Bon is singing more love songs, more generally singing, and less of the lascivious stuff that he is known for.

Although there's "She's Got Balls," and "Soul Stripper" has his trademark kind of sauciness about it. But again, "She's Got Balls" really has that relentless driving power that AC/DC is known for, so that's a really good pointer to what they became. And "Show Business" sort of prefaces "It's a Long Way to the Top." I think the first lines are *You learn to sing/ You learn to play/Why don't the businessmen/Ever learn to pay?* That's perhaps a trial run at exploring the things that Bon later develops with "It's a Long Way to the Top."

POPOFF: So we were learning about Bon.

SIBONY: Sure, and all his struggles. But he overcame it and became the ultimate rock star, didn't he? Or if not rock star, grinding, working musician.

He lived the life; there's no two ways about it. Angus would say, "I could come home from a gig at three o'clock in the morning, and Bon is like, 'Okay, one more drink.'" He would not stop. But I just loved his attitude. He was a really fun-loving guy and would come across like he just really liked life and wanted to take advantage of everything. But it also seemed like he knew that he didn't have a long time to live. He was on that road and he didn't care. He lived that lifestyle and you could hear it in his lyrics.

POPOFF: But even on *High Voltage*, AC/DC were as much about the guitars as anything Bon would be on about, right?

SIBONY: Yes, and you've got to give the brothers a lot of musical credit, you know? They had the same manager as Aerosmith at one time, David Krebs, who said, "Joe Perry had nothing on Angus." Which summed it up. Joe was the guitar god, whereas Angus, just because of his silliness and his little boy act, was never really considered a serious guitarist.

Although in terms of composition, Malcolm was the guy who wrote most of the licks and was the leader of the band. Originally, Angus wasn't even in the band, and Malcolm got him in the band to play lead. Malcolm had a great line. He said that working on leads interrupted his drinking [laughs]. But if you listen to the records, it's beautifully done. They stereo'ed it really nicely, with Malcolm on one side representing the low part of the frequencies while Angus takes care of the high part. Exactly like George and Harry did in the Easybeats.

POPOFF: And the pattern is set, and a sound is born, right here on the tracks comprising *High Voltage*.

SIBONY: But the beauty of it is that at the base, it's common pentatonic blue stuff. But the way Malcolm turns it around, and what he does rhythmically to it, makes it his own. There's no really explaining that kind of magic. I mean, everybody loved AC/DC as far as my memory is concerned, growing up. If you look at the history, everybody loved them. And at the root, they were just a great party band. Somehow, they took that party and barroom mentality and made it work in a stadium, which is so rare.



High Voltage international (bottom) and European (top) cover art, 1976.



CHAPTER

2

ISSUE VARIANCE NOTES: Issued in Australia only; however, the international debut of the band, called *High Voltage*, issued in April 1976 in the United States and the following month in Europe, contains seven of nine tracks, the exceptions being “Rocker” and “School Days.” The international *High Voltage* adds two tracks from the Australian issue *High Voltage*, namely “She’s Got Balls” and “Little Lover.”

SIDE 1

1. It’s a Long Way to the Top (If You Wanna Rock ‘n’ Roll) 5:15
2. Rock ‘n’ Roll Singer 5:04
3. The Jack 5:52
4. Live Wire 5:49

SIDE 2

1. T.N.T. 3:34
2. Rocker 2:49
3. Can I Sit Next to You Girl 4:12
4. High Voltage 4:02
5. School Days 5:23

All songs composed by Angus Young, Malcolm Young, and Bon Scott except “Can I Sit Next to You Girl” (Angus Young and Malcolm Young) and “School Days” (Chuck Berry)

Personnel: Bon Scott—lead vocals, bagpipes; Angus Young—lead guitar; Malcolm Young—rhythm guitar, backing vocals; Mark Evans—bass; Phil Rudd—drums, percussion

Released December 1, 1975

Recorded at Albert Studios, Sydney, Australia

Produced by Harry Vanda and George Young

T.N.T.

with RICH DAVENPORT and ROBERT SIBONY



Folks tend to look at AC/DC’s second album, *T.N.T.*, as the record on which the band’s trademark sound is codified. That argument only goes so far, with “The Jack,” “Rocker,” “Can I Sit to You Girl,” and the cover of Chuck Berry’s “School Days” sitting just as far to the left as three-quarters of the first album and one-third or so of the third record, *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap*.

But sure, the rest of this charmingly twee album works to establish the band’s open architecture and almost hypnotic sense of repetition—instantly, in fact, with “It’s a Long Way to the Top” and “The Rock ‘n’ Roll Singer,” on which Harry Vanda and,

more so, George Young, and then Malcolm Young, propose a new form of mere abstract art, namely music that puts ambition and ego aside. It's almost a dare to the critics to empty their minds and embrace the Zen, or perhaps punk rock's aural nihilism before punk rock even existed.

The embrace of almost nothing continues blissfully, sublimely, with "Live Wire," "T.N.T.," and "High Voltage," the tightest suite of songs from a style standpoint. Flip the mirror, and *T.N.T.* is the manifestation of everything set in motion at the hands of Vanda and Young in terms of building of an Australian pop and easy-listening landscape, funneled through the fidgety hands of what may as well have been four schoolboys and their ersatz other older brother, the troublemaker of the family, Bon Scott.

OPPOSITE: The 1975 Australia-only *T.N.T.* would provide the bulk of the material to appear on the international version of *High Voltage*. Confused yet?

BELOW: *T.N.T.* worked to establish AC/DC's almost hypnotic sense of repetition—perhaps punk rock's aural nihilism before punk rock even existed. Here the band plays at another sort of nihilism at the 1975 photoshoot for the "Jailbreak" poster.



Malcolm and Harry waiting to go on. Opera House Concert Hall, Sydney, June 1974. Malcolm did double duty with headliner Stevie Wright, whom Vanda also backed.



Back to the original premise. The pre-headbang head nod of AC/DC, its central idea, its Sweet-and-Slade-meet-Status Quo, one might say is spread across the first three albums. And then, really, the next three have such strong personalities of their own, I'm ready to throw up my hands and propose that the most belabored "trademark AC/DC sound" is in fact the one spread across every last Brian Johnson record from *Back in Black* to *Rock or Bust*. In other words, the AC/DC of the Bon Scott years is in fact not to be denigrated as a bunch of the same, but as a potpourri of curios, as evidenced here in *T.N.T.*'s glam and boogie and blues.

We must praise *T.N.T.* for repeated hammering home of a remarkable "so old it's new" sound, as more like accidentally stumbled upon through the likes of the debut's "Soul Stripper," "Stick Around," and most instructively, "She's Got Balls," the mention of which brings up a point of housekeeping that we may as well deal with right here: for those who might be a bit confused by the existence of the *T.N.T.* album, six out of its eight tracks were chosen to comprise the international version of what was called *High Voltage*, the band's first album issued internationally. In other words, as far as North America and Europe were concerned, AC/DC debuted in May 1976 with a record called *High Voltage* that had very little to do with the band's Australian debut of the same name. The international *High Voltage* is every song from *T.N.T.* except for "Rocker" and "School Days," both swapped out for "Little Lover" and "She's Got Balls."

In this light, AC/DC was forced to make their awkward introductions to the world with what was essentially their 1975 record, while they ran around bumping into each other all excited about their third record . . . which wouldn't hit America until 1981.

POPOFF: To start, what kind of record do we get with *T.N.T.*? The band seems less derivative than on the debut, wouldn't you say?

SIBONY: Sure, I think *T.N.T.* established the AC/DC sound and is one of their greatest albums. It shows how simple the songs could be, but so powerful. And I think what they really understood back then, George was really adamant about making sure that with Angus and Malcolm, any guitar licks, they would have to go to the piano and actually play it and be able to sing it. You know, similar to the "old gray whistle test" from the Brill Building, which was like a song factory and publishing house.