



Headbanger's Ball

An interview with Angus Young of AC/DC.

The year 1973 saw Abba form in Sweden and AC/DC form in Sydney. The latter band survived the death of singer Bon Scott in 1980. Their new album, *Ballbreaker*, (recorded with former Beastie Boys producer Rick Rubin) sees original legendary drummer Phil Rudd back in the band after a 10 year absence.

The British tolls operator does her "normal spiel", advising Mr Young and Mr Cammick that "due to Government regulations, as this call is being taped, a tone will be heard every 15 seconds."

With Phil back in the band, did you have to readjust?

"No, not with Phil on drums. He was the original drummer. Even though we've had good drummers over the years, they always had to emulate the style of Phil, because that's the style of what AC/DC is. When we played in New Zealand last, he came to the show in Auckland and saw us, and said he'd like to do it again."

You had a very successful album, *The Razor's Edge*, with producer Bruce Fairburn. Were you tempted to repeat that combination?

"For us, it's not the success of something, we don't count in numbers, we're a band concerned with what pleases us musically first. With this album, we wanted it to be raw, free of

the high scale production that's crept in the last few years. Even though they say it's all back to the raw roots of rock 'n' roll, when I hear a lot of what's being produced out there, especially coming from America, it's still got that West Coast sound, that very slick polish. We've always avoided that. For us, it was getting away from that hi-tech thing. I think each producer you work with wants to put his own stamp on your production. We don't want to change our sound. We know how we sound. That's what people know AC/DC as."

Why did you choose Rick Rubin to produce?

"He's been chasing us since I met him in the mid-80s when he was into rap and sampling. But even then he said to me: 'I'm really a rocker. I want to get more involved in rock music.' Every time we went into a studio he'd put his name up to be the producer. When we recorded the 'Big Gun' single [for the *Last Action Hero* soundtrack], we thought it'd be a good testing ground to see how we work with him. He's a fan

of AC/DC. He said all he used with other people, he learnt from AC/DC records."

Was there a danger of Rick Rubin doing a retro album?

"Sure, there is that, but we had said: 'This is how AC/DC is now.' You can't go back. We always like to improve on what we've done."

Any outrageous videos lined-up?

"Sure, part of AC/DC is a visual thing. I still think the best thing is, when you see AC/DC, we've always got something up our sleeve."

How important is that sense of humour in album titles and lyrics and visuals?

"Well, we don't think of ourselves as hilarious — laugh, laugh, laugh — but we try to use humour. You can put a smile on people's faces, it doesn't have to be taken so seriously. I think a lot of people writing rock 'n' roll think you have to make a statement.

Less is best. We try to keep the music good, simple and direct."

Were you frustrated when you were labelled heavy metal?

"Well, no, it never really bothered us. We knew what we were as a band. In the 70s, when they started to label bands, we had all the labels from a punk band to a power-pop band. When I was growing up, it was good or bad, you either liked it or you didn't. Even the category heavy rock didn't exist. If someone said 'heavy metal', all I could think of was Iron Butterfly. When Malcolm was playing in clubs, the 'Nam ships would come in and want to hear [Iron Butterfly's] 'In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida'. I thought 'heavy metal' was a put down, we were a rock 'n' roll band."

Is it true you like to check the progress of your recording on a car stereo?

"Yeah, that comes from how you like to hear music. I was always used to going to a gig, or coming home from a gig, listening to a good dose of rock 'n' roll to get the blood going."

What's on your car stereo?

"Elmore James, a lot of those older CDs that have been reissued."

The CD era has been good for rediscovering things.

"Yeah, it has. You're hearing out-takes, things you might not have heard before, different versions of a song."

Do AC/DC have some basement tapes?

"Yeah, sure, a lot of different things from over the years."

Do artists want out-takes released?

"It's good to have control. It's great for hardened fans to hear these things. For AC/DC, we get a lot of people ask us about Bon Scott and whether there are any basement tapes. I always remember the horror of Jimi Hendrix when in one year there were about 300 records put out. Even when he was in the room someone would say he was on the record. On some of them you wouldn't even know he was playing on them and they didn't seem to do him justice."

Is Phil Rudd doing the tours?

"Yeah, we kick off in America in January, and we should be in Australia and New Zealand late 96."

Angus Young is not keen on AC/DC biography writers looking for a sensationalist movie script. Wouldn't you like a chance to get the story straight?

"Well, if a fan comes up to me and asks personally, wants to know something, I'll tell him. But when someone comes through the door and says: 'Hey, I've got a big fat cheque in my pocket and I've just been paid a lot of money to write something,' looking for some dirt to write on you, instead of looking at what you've done as a band, then I go: 'I don't want to talk to you'."

"How's that volcano going down there?," asks Angus.

We talk about the spring ski season and my concept of a "friendly volcano", then he bids a cheery goodbye.

"I've got a big day, today."

MURRAY CAMMICK



When I grew up, rock 'n' roll was Chuck Berry singing about cars and having a good time. I still believe that's rock 'n' roll. When people start making statements, I always find it like they're preaching."

What music inspired you to get into music?

"Well, 50s rock 'n' roll. Malcolm, my brother, and myself, Bon, we were all into Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard — when we had a party those were always our big records we'd have on — and a lot of blues too, like Freddy King, Elmore James, Muddy Waters."

You've been part of creating a style of heavy rock. What moved you in that direction?

"We never looked at ourselves as a heavy rock type thing. We've always looked at ourselves as a tough rock 'n' roll band with a tough sound. You throw out all the trimmings.

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