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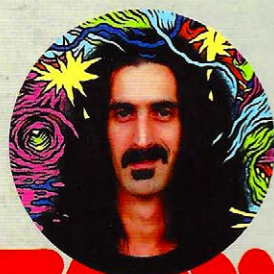
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Bon Almighty!

It's 35 years since the death of AC/DC singer **Bon Scott**, but he remains the greatest rock'n'roller of them all. As his former bandmates hit the UK for a stadium tour, we dig deep into the myth – and the man behind it...

WORDS: MICK WALL

At the height of AC/DC's Australian success in the mid-70s, before they'd cracked it in Britain, let alone America, Bon Scott was already a star in his own mind. Sitting in some pub in Sydney, a large beer and a quadruple whisky on the table before him, that gap-toothed grin on his face and a friendly Sheila by his side, he would be the life and soul of the party. As his great friend and former AC/DC tour manager Ian Jeffery recalls, it didn't matter if he'd been in the place before.

"Wherever Bon went," says Jeffery, "by the end of the night he'd have made ten new best friends."

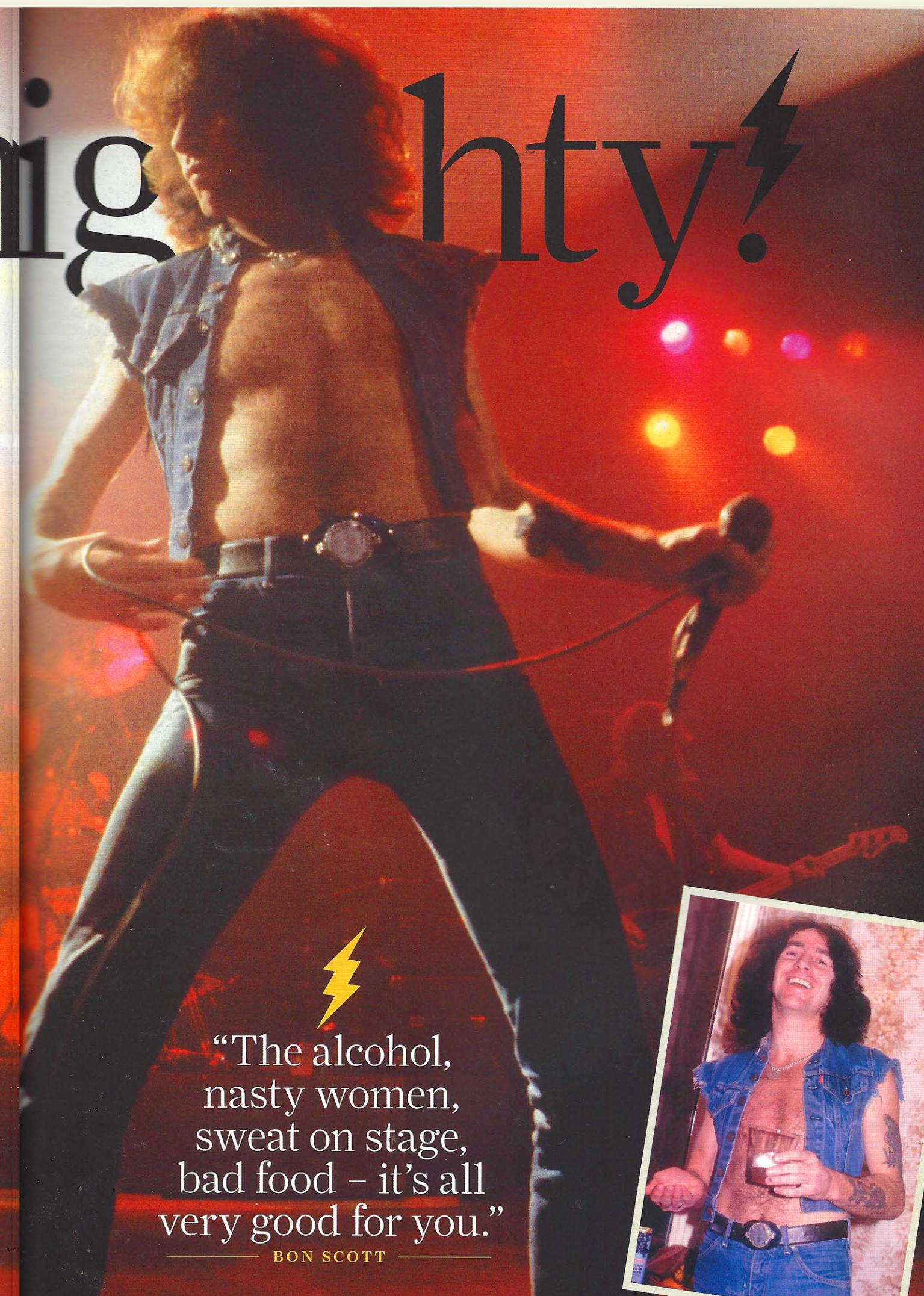
But he might just as easily have made 10 new enemies. With his wild larrikin laugh, gypsy glint in his eye and piratical tattoos festooned along his taut muscly arms, Bon was fond of a 'blue' – Aussie-speak for a punch-up. But only if he'd failed to charm someone first, felling them with a brilliant one-liner. When the rough-and-tough blokes that frequented the Sydney bars where Bon liked to go would try to get a rise out of him, ask if he was AC or DC – a real man or a proper poofier – Bon would reply: "Neither. I'm the flash in the middle."

"Bon had that way about him," says Jeffery, "He had the words, knew how to give them the face. And if that still didn't work, look out!"

According to Angus Young, it was this furiously but frighteningly feisty aspect of Bon Scott's character that moulded the best of AC/DC's music. "He was one of the dirtiest fuckers I know," Angus would smirk. "When I first met him he couldn't even speak English – it was all 'fuck', 'c**t', 'piss', 'shit'."

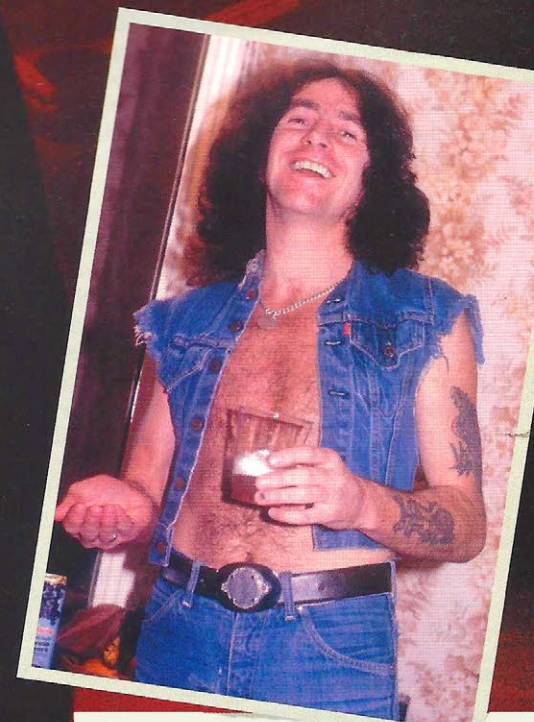
But then the Bon Scott era of the band was far removed from the polished professionalism of the AC/DC that brings its *Rock Or Bust* tour to the UK at the end of June. If you are going to that you are going to enjoy one of the slickest rock-of-ages shows out there. There was nothing slick or polished about the band that Bon Scott fronted, though. When he sang 'If you want blood... you got it' he fucking meant it, pal.

But there was also another side to Bon, one that the outside world rarely got to see. ☒



⚡
"The alcohol, nasty women, sweat on stage, bad food – it's all very good for you."

— BON SCOTT —





Red alert: Bon (second left) with heartbreaking popsters The Valentines.



running. Things changed when he discovered Chuck Berry and Little Richard as a teenager. He would sing their songs around the house, until his mother begged him to stop. "My mum used to say, 'Ron, if you can't sing proper songs, shut up!,' he later recalled. "Don't sing this rock'n'roll garbage."

Leaving school at 15, he and his first serious girlfriend, Maureen Henderson, would dress up and go rock'n'roll jiving. By now he was also a cigarette smoker and drinker, then dope smoker and speed freak. It wasn't long before he was part of the local 'mobs' – street gangs of teenage hoodlums. The roughest, toughest member of the gang, Bon quickly became leader. There were various jobs – tractor driver, fisherman, apprentice mechanic. Bon didn't care what he did for money. He knew what he was going to do with his life, he told Maureen: "Be a singer in a rock'n'roll band."

He got his ear-pierced – unheard of for a teenage boy in the early 1960s – then went one step further and got his first tattoo: the words 'Death Before

Dishonour'. Not on his arm, though, but on his lower belly, just above his pubes. When a friend was beaten up by cops, Bon went wild and beat one of them half to death. He somehow got away with it – then got arrested stealing 12 gallons of petrol. Housed in a maximum-security facility, Bon – who would later write the early AC/DC classic *Jailbreak* – spent almost a year behind bars.

It was meant to be hard and it was. There were no open dormitories, only locked cells, and sexual assault was rife. Released just before Christmas 1963, Bon emerged more determined than ever to live his dream. His break came when he landed a gig drumming with covers band The Spektors. Bon decided it would be cool for the drummer to sing a couple of songs. Nobody was

going to argue with the little hard nut just out of the slammer and Bon's raucous version of The Kinks' *You Really Got Me* became a highlight of the set. Bon certainly thought so.

It was at a Spektors gig that Bon met a stunning 17-year-old blonde named Maria Van Vlijman. Maria later claimed Bon asked her to marry him and that she would have let him, were it not for the fact she knew that when he wasn't with her he was off with some other "scrag" from the gig. With Maria, though, Bon was always on his best behaviour, never swearing, never drinking.

Eventually The Spektors merged with rival covers act The Winstons, fronted by singer Vince Lovegrove, to form The Valentines. Specialising initially in pop-soul covers, both Vince and Bon would front The Vallies, as they became known.

"He had a lot of the hippie ethics of the time," says Peter Head, a bandmate and friend of Bon's from before his time in AC/DC. "He'd read, he'd think about religion and philosophy. You could talk about serious things."

There was also the kind-hearted guy who would – literally – give you the shirt right off his back. "He was accepting of anyone," says his former wife, Irene Thornton, "from kids to old people. He just had a very bubbly personality and a lovely laugh, and would be very quick with a joke."

And there was Bon the gentleman. "He was lovely to women, and women loved him," says Fifa Riccobono, former CEO of AC/DC's label, Albert Music. "My mum came in the office, this old Italian widow, and Bon put his arm around her. He was tattooed, tooth missing. His charm was disarming."

But that was Bon Scott. "A great bunch of guys," as former AC/DC manager Michael Browning ruefully puts it. "You just never quite knew which one you were gonna get – until it was too late." He laughs, but the sadness in his voice is still there.

So what's the true story of Bon Scott? Comedian, tragedian, entertainer, depressive, he was all of those things. He was also a prodigious drug-taker, serial womaniser, heroic drunk, poetic lyric writer. A man who loved the company of strangers yet yearned for a simpler life. A guy who helped take AC/DC to the top of the tree, yet didn't live long enough to enjoy any of the material benefits. A sun-worshipper and a night-crawler with a body already bowed and broken long before it finally gave out on him, that cold lonely night in February 1980.

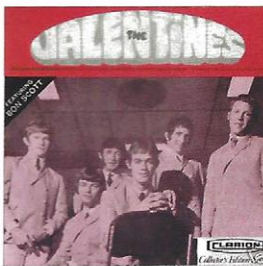
We know how the story ends, but where did it start, really? Before the mythmakers and idolaters turned it into a two-dimensional story of one clown and his many laughing followers?

Ronald Belford Scott was born in Forfar on 9 July 1946, but the fighting man was in his blood from generations past. The Scotts had been a powerful lowland clan, whose motto was 'Amo: 'I Love'. They were staunch supporters of Robert the Bruce, fighting alongside him at Bannockburn. When he was excommunicated by the Pope, so were the Scotts, who were also threatened with death for following him. You want to know where Bon got his rebellious streak from, ask Robert.

The musical side came from his father, Chick. When his pipe band came marching by the house on Saturdays, little Ronnie, as his mother Isa called him, would drum along, walloping the breadboard with forks and spoons. His wanderlust was instilled early, when the family emigrated to Australia in 1952, taking advantage of the same 'assisted passages' that would later allow the Young family to make a new life for itself there.

Staying initially with Isa's sister in the Melbourne suburbs, Ronnie was enrolled in primary school, where his skills as a marching drummer made him popular with the other kids. In 1956, the Scotts moved to Fremantle, near Perth. It was there that Ronnie got his nickname. Picking up on the handy congruity of his surname, little Ronnie Scott became little Bonnie-Scotland. He hated it and would fight anyone who used it in the playground, but it stuck. By the time he was a teenager, even his mates called him Bonnie – or Bon, for short.

Good at athletics, but better at music, he was the under-17 marching drums champion five years



Autograph or phone number? Fan action on the road.

Vince was the handsome hunk who covered the songs straight-faced; Bon his cheeky sidekick. In their puff sleeves and blue sharkskin suits, they would belt out *Build Me Up Buttercup*, Bon clutching his breast on the word *heart*. "We had a pretty wild stage act," Lovegrove recalled. "We'd jump up on the amps, have firebombs going off..."

A couple of singles made it into the Western Australian charts, but it was two years before they got their national break, with their songs written for them by George Young and Harry Vanda of Aussie rock sensations The Easybeats and, later, AC/DC's producer-mentors.

The band relocated to Melbourne, then the epicentre of the Aussie music biz. Bon wrote to Maria, who had already moved there, telling her he hoped "we can both have a good time together when I arrive" or he would be "so flippin' lonely". His plans soon got buried beneath Bon's hectic new life carousing the local nightspots. Explaining the Vallies' appeal, Vince Lovegrove said: "I'm more popular than Bon. But he's a far better singer than I'll ever be. In fact, I think he's the most underrated singer in Australia."

But Bon was tiring of the "cabaret act" the Vallies had become. When an old mate from the Perth scene, Billy Thorpe, showed up in Melbourne with his new rock'n'roll outfit, The Aztecs, Bon took to making unannounced appearances at their shows, belting out *Whole Lotta Love* and *Long Tall Sally*. "He was a fucking madman," recalled Thorpe. Bon would get high and tell Billy: "You know I'm going to make it, I'm going to fucking make it."

The Valentines were busted very publicly for possession of marijuana in 1969. When their next single—a sumptuous pop ballad written and sung by Bon entitled *Juliette*—was refused radio play as a result, Bon became angry, bitter, disenfranchised from the whole ethos of the group. Even the normally upbeat Lovegrove threw in the towel.

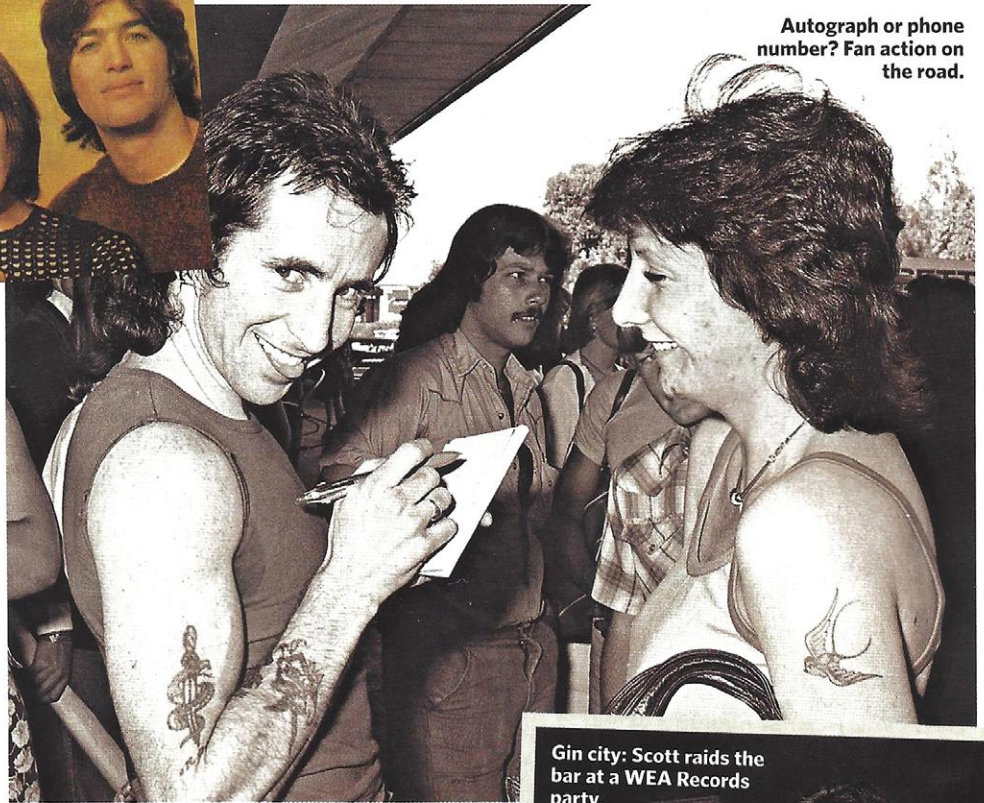
Still only 23, Bon was sure there was still time for him to make his mark, so he split for the hippy hills outside Adelaide, where he intended, in the vernacular of the day, to get his head together. Except of course his head had gone long ago...

The next few years would be even more calamitous, personally and professionally, for Bon Scott, than the years that followed in AC/DC. Hooking up with another friend from the Perth scene, bassist Bruce Howe, in folk-rock outfit Fraternity, Bon grew a beard and took to playing the recorder, yearning for musical respectability.

"I got sick of doing bopper audiences with The Valentines and I wanted to become a musician, to be recognised in the Australian rock scene as more than just an arse shaker," as he later put it.

Gordon 'Buzz' Bidstrup, who would later become the drummer with The Angels, met Bon during this time. "He was a long-haired recorder-playing hippie," says Bidstrup. "He lived up in the hills, took magic mushrooms and smoked pot. I don't remember him as being a hell-raiser, fighter guy. When I met him he was this hippie dude, as we all were. Long robes and all this stuff..."

He couldn't keep it up. Fraternity's keyboardist John 'JB' Bisset acknowledges the Bon may have become "a little Pan-like," early on. Mostly, though, he recalls the Bon with the wicked gleam in his eye. "Bon was a great



"Bon was a great bunch of guys. You never knew which one you were gonna get."

⚡ MICHAEL BROWNING ⚡

one for dispelling myths about acid culture, like the vegetarianism that many hippies embraced. I remember him wandering around chomping on a leg of roast beef at one very acid-soaked party."

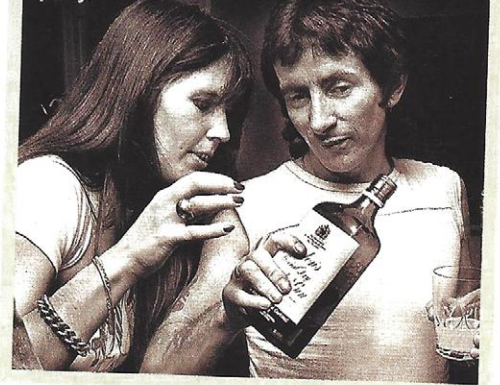
As with The Vallies, Fraternity enjoyed a couple of local hits—notably, *Season Of Change*, with Bon on exquisite lead vocals and moody recorder. The band decided to fly their freak flag all the way to London, taking with them wives, girlfriends, children, roadies and tour manager. Bon, who'd recently become close to a pretty blonde local girl named Irene Thornton, talked her into going with him—as his wife. The two were married on January, 24 1972, in Adelaide. The trip to London with Fraternity was to be their honeymoon.

"The first time I saw him I think I sort of grimaced a bit," Irene says now, with a laugh. "He was bare-chested, little shorts on, no shoes, arm around a girl, drink in the other hand, weaving his way through a crowd and laughing his head off, which was a typical Bon image. I think I thought something like, you've got to be kidding..."

The next time they met, at a Fraternity show, Irene saw him in a different light. "He cracked a couple of jokes, and that changed my opinion of him. I made a comment about his really tight jeans—'What a well packed lunch!'—and he just as quickly said, 'Yep, two hard boiled eggs and a sausage', and went on talking while I was killing myself laughing... I suddenly thought, he's not really silly. And I was quite intrigued with him."

Living in North London, money was so tight Bon took a part-time job behind the bar in a local pub. Worse still, good dope—so plentiful in the

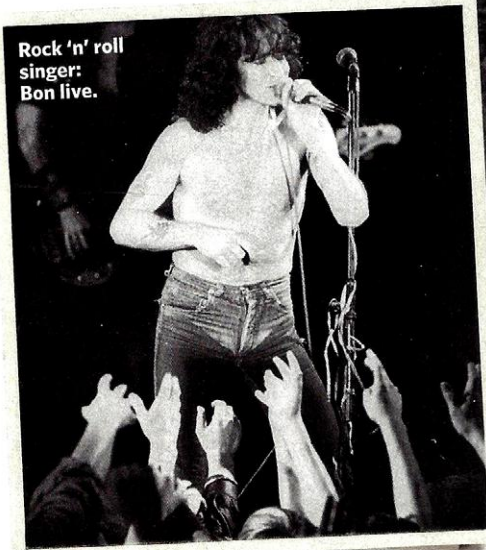
Gin city: Scott raids the bar at a WEA Records party.



Adelaide hills—was hard to come by. Not that they were choosy. Bon was nicknamed Road Test Ronnie, as he was always the first to sample any new drugs that came their way. "He seemed able to cope with any drug that science or nature could come up with," recalled John Bisset. The only time he came a cropper was when he 'road-tested' some datura, a powerful hallucinogen. "He had a bad couple of days and the rest of us avoided it."

Things went downhill from there. Blown off opening for Status Quo, made to look out-dated by the new glam threads of Slade, even a change of name and image—to Fang—failed to make a difference. They were finally put to shame opening for a modestly successful act named Geordie at Torquay Town Hall. Bon was spellbound by the band's singer, Brian Johnson, who'd finished the gig on his back screaming in agony (Bon didn't know he'd burst an appendix and the agony was real). Johnson's long-ago memories of his one and only meeting with Bon are wonderfully piquant: "Short hair, tooth missing. He was the funniest man and we had a lovely time." Though he added: "He wasn't half as good as he was when he joined AC/DC. They brought something out in him."

Soon afterwards, Fraternity/Fang called it a day and returned to Australia. But before the bright new dawn came the gloom. Back home, Bon became involved with a musical collective ☒



Rock 'n' roll singer: Bon live.



Battle dress: joining the Tartan Army for the '74 World Cup.



AC/DC, the making of Scott.

called the Mount Lofty Rangers, fronted by Peter Head. But Bon grew impatient and began to take out his frustrations on everybody.

"Bon was almost 28, and had not reached the fame and fortune he desired," Vince Lovegrove explained. "He felt trapped, frustrated, almost too old."

He began fighting with Irene. Bon was in a downward spiral that finally hit rock bottom on the night of Friday, 22 February 1974. He had turned up already drunk for a Rangers session.

"He always had either a flask of red or, more often, a bottle of Jack Daniel's on him," says Head now. "It was pretty intense. In those days you'd drink and drive, too. He used to ride a motorbike around, and he'd be out of his head all the time."

Not for the first time, the others got the feeling that Friday night that the problem wasn't so much whatever Bon said it was but whatever was going on in his head. Suddenly he got into it with them. Called one a c**t. Offered to bash their brains in. Then he smashed through the door and out onto his bike again, hurling his now empty bottle of Jack onto the ground where it shattered.

Vince Lovegrove got the phone call from Irene at about 2am. She was calling from Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Bon had run his bike into an oncoming car. Now he was in a coma.

Doctors told Irene to prepare for the worst. Would she like a priest to come and give her husband the last rites? One of the nurses informed her that before he blacked out, Bon had been hallucinating, talking gibberish. "He said he's a singer," she told Irene, rolling her eyes.

Eighteen days later, Bon Scott was discharged from hospital. Much to his doctors' surprise he was alive, though it would be sometime, before he would be able to walk unaided. His marriage was also over. Irene had had enough. Hobbling around on crutches, sleeping on Lovegrove's couch, Bon was working as a gofer at Vince's talent agency the first time he met the band with whom he made his legend.

Fifa Riccobono was A&R manager at Albert Music in the 1970s. She recalls seeing Bon during one his first appearances with the band. "It was his first night in Sydney with the band," she says. "Bon was very crass, very loud and rather obnoxious, but in a funny way. The manager said, 'Do you

"Bon was in rough shape. He was drunk most of the time or sleeping it off."

⚡ DOUG THALER ⚡

want to come back and meet Bon? I was prepared for a fairly rough encounter. And it was the opposite. He was charming, he picked up my hand and kissed it. He had a tooth missing and a shark's tooth around his neck, and he looked quite menacing. But he was just gorgeous."

The next few years have become a well-told part of the AC/DC story. How Bon replaced original vocalist Dave Evans, bringing a more earthy image to the band, as well as a staggering talent for storytelling lyrics and a marvellously characterful voice, part-Paul Rodgers, part-Artful Dodger. How AC/DC became stars at home, before setting out to conquer Britain, and, finally, after many setbacks, America, with an album, *Highway To Hell*, that stands as one of the greatest of all time. How it ended with Bon's worn-out body left to die in the seat of a car belonging to someone he hardly knew.

The stories have been told but the truth has rarely been allowed out from where it's been hiding in plain sight all these years. The often-contradictory aspects of Bon Scott's life and personality that confused even him.

There was his extraordinary relationship with the Young brothers. Before AC/DC, says Irene, "he felt like he was an old bloke in the music world and a has-been... like it was all finished for him." When, within weeks of joining, Malcolm ordered Bon to cut his long hair, he complied immediately. Pushing 30, amazed at being given this last chance, Bon knew where his bread was buttered. A fact he would never allow himself to forget.

It was different with the other brother. "I think the main thing Bon liked about AC/DC was Angus," says Peter Head. "He was just knocked out by Angus. Bon was really looking for that sense of showmanship, the theatre to go with it. And so AC/DC gave him the opportunity to go a bit crazy and let that side of his personality reign a little bit."

As the years have gone by, we have read of all the times Bon nearly missed the gig because he'd been too busy partying with yet more of those "new best friends" Ian Jeffery talks of; the times he nearly died mixing drugs and drink, most notably when two prostitute sisters in Sydney shot him up with smack and he woke up in hospital; the other times when he would boast of having all-night orgies in his hotel room.

What we heard very little of were the times, alone on the road, when Bon would ponder the choices he had made. When his brother Graeme began a relationship with Irene's sister Faye, Bon wondered what he'd lost when he'd walked out on his own marriage. When his other brother Derek got married and had kids, he wondered what the cost was of his quest for... what? Another drink? Another chick? Was that it, really?

The closest Bon Scott ever really got to love, after Irene, was with Margaret 'Silver' Smith, hippie trail enchantress, heroin user and queen of the long nights. The same age as Bon, and with the same tastes for the exotic, Silver had left Adelaide and begun travelling not long after Bon had returned from London with Fraternity.

"I just set off around the world on my own and met a lot of very interesting people," she recalled in a rare interview with 891 ABC Radio in Adelaide in February 2010. "When Bon arrived in London I'd been here for quite some time." She claimed Ronnie Wood from the Rolling Stones "became a friend" and that they shared a house where she worked for him in some unspecified role. "So I went to a lot of really interesting gigs."

Through my work as a PR for bands like Journey and Black Sabbath, I met both Bon and Silver in the summer of 1979 at her tiny bedsit in West London. The pair had a history, she told me. True love, as she told it, thwarted by Bon's ambition and Silver's refusal to be the little lady left behind at home.

Continued on page 121



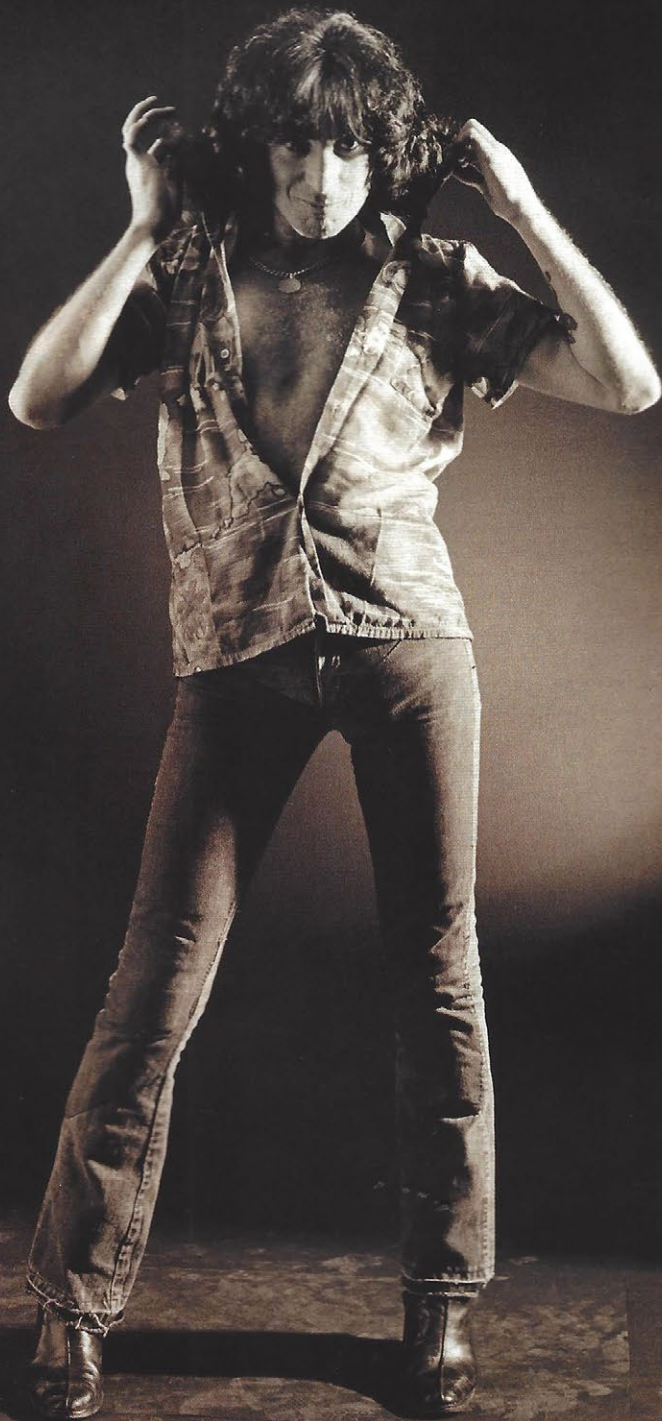
Proof that Bon was head and shoulders above the competition.

Let There Be Rock!

BON SCOTT ⚡ THE SONGS

WORDS: PAUL ELLIOTT

Scott's AC/DC legacy amounts to six years, six studio albums and 57 tracks. Here we rank every one that the great man recorded with the band, from high-voltage classics to obscure B-sides and everlasting anthems.



57 FLING THING It was just a joke, really. A version of the traditional Scottish song *Bonny Banks Of Loch Lomond*, recorded in tribute to the band's heritage, and knocked out in the manner of a pub singalong. It was released as the B-side to *Jailbreak* in 1976.

56 LOVE SONG The only ballad in the entire catalogue, *Love Song* was a mistake that was not repeated.

Written when Dave Evans was the singer, it was reworked for the debut album, *High Voltage*, but sounded twee and out of character. Bon was not cut out to be a romantic crooner.

55 YOU AIN'T GOT A HOLD ON ME Of the eight tracks on the original *High Voltage* only two were included on the international version. Among those dropped was *You Ain't Got A Hold On Me*, which, very simply, lacked balls.

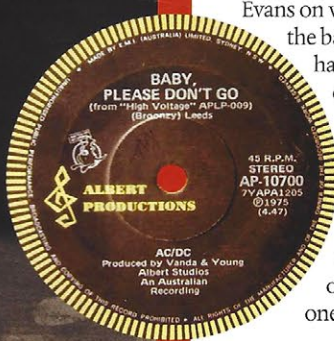
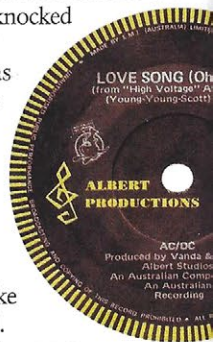
54 STICK AROUND The riff was punchy but the chorus was a dud, so it was dumped after it appeared on the Aussie *High Voltage*.

53 BABY, PLEASE DON'T GO For a new band on their debut, this was a strange choice for an opener—a cover of a blues standard written by Big Joe Williams in the 1930s and later popularised by Them. But AC/DC knew how to make it work for them. They played it fast, and they played it hard.

52 SQUEALER *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap* was once memorably described as AC/DC's most "deviant" album, and it ends with their sleaziest song. *Squealer* is the sordid tale of Bon's struggle to seduce a nervous virgin, played out over an insistent riff. There was only one way this was going to end, with Bon gloating: 'I fixed her good.' For all his qualities, political correctness was not among them.

51 CAN I SIT NEXT TO YOU, GIRL The first version of this song, with Dave Evans on vocals, was released in 1974 as the band's debut single. Once Bon had got his teeth into it it took on a far more decadent flavour.

50 SCHOOL DAYS The band's second album, *T.N.T.*, ended with a cover of a song by Chuck Berry originally released in 1957. As one of the pioneers of rock'n'roll,



Bon was a hero to AC/DC. Their version of *School Days* stayed true to the spirit of the original, with Bon yelling the immortal refrain 'Hail, hail, rock'n'roll!' with the conviction of a true believer.

49 CARRY ME HOME
In this drinking song, released in 1977 as the B-side to *Dog Eat Dog*, there was humour of the blackest kind. Bon sang it as if plastered, but it didn't sound like much fun: lying in a pool of beer on a barroom floor and throwing up. Just a throwaway song, perhaps, but in it is a grim foreshadowing of his own end.

48 THERE'S GONNA BE SOME ROCKIN'
In some respects this was their laziest song, a simple boogie shuffle with lyrics about a rock'n'roll show – the kind of thing they could have written in their sleep. The beauty is in the way they play it. It's all about feel – you've either got it or you haven't.

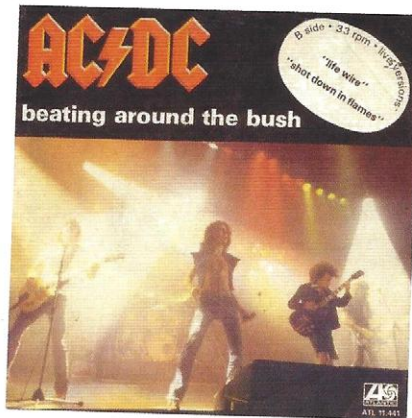
47 R.I.P. (ROCK IN PEACE)
In this rowdy song there was a simple message. In Bon's words: 'Fuck off while I'm playing.' *R.I.P.* was originally included on the Australian *Dirty Deeds*, but on international versions of the album it was replaced by the superior *Rocker*.

46 SHOW BUSINESS
From Bon's pre-AC/DC early career came a hard-earned wisdom handed down in this ballsy track from the first *High Voltage*. In a business run on bullshit, there was one guy who spoke the truth.

45 SOUL STRIPPER
On this standout track from the debut album, Bon cast himself in the unlikely role of victim – the mind games of a manipulative woman messing with his head. The song's rhythmic tension gave it a mesmeric quality.

44 AIN'T NO FUN (WAITING ROUND TO BE A MILLIONAIRE)
On a key track from *Dirty Deeds*, the band kept it simple, just plugging away, as Bon indulged himself in the classic poor boy's fantasy – to make it rich in a rock'n'roll band. As he explained in an interview: 'It takes a long time to make enough money to be able to fuck Britt Ekland.'

43 BIG BALLS
It wasn't so much double-entendre as single. *Big Balls* was one long, extended joke, on which Bon adopted a posh accent as he mused: 'Some balls are held for charity and some for fancy dress/But when they're held for pleasure, they're the balls that I like best.' With the band playing as if drunk, it ended with a chorus of 'Bollocks! Knackers! Bollocks! Knackers!' Like farting, it's still funny after all these years.



42 LOVE HUNGRY MAN
This sleeper track from *Highway To Hell* is a funky little number. Malcolm Young dismissed it as "too pop", but it's one of the band's coolest songs.

41 LOVE AT FIRST FEEL
Everything about this song is so classically AC/DC, from the cheeky title down to the badass groove. From the *Dirty Deeds* album, it has all the swagger of a saddle-sore John Wayne.

40 COLD-HEARTED MAN
There's a darkly atmospheric quality to *Cold-Hearted Man*: a sense of foreboding in its slow, creeping riff and its story of a mysterious loner with 'ice in his eyes'. But it's a song that has slipped through the cracks: included on the original European *Powerage* but omitted from later editions.

39 LITTLE LOVER
From the original Aussie version of *High Voltage*, this priapic heavy blues number included one of Bon's naughtiest asides: 'Killed me when I saw the wet patch on your seat/Was it... Coca-Cola?'

38 DOG EAT DOG
No other song is as downright gnarly as this: a blast of bludgeon riffola from *Let There Be Rock*, on which Bon spoke of the fight for survival but with tongue in cheek: 'Dog eat dog/Eat cat too/Frenchy eat frog/And I eat you.'



37 BEATING AROUND THE BUSH
AC/DC never played faster than on this white-knuckle ride from *Highway To Hell*. And as Bon bitched about yet another troublesome woman, he held nothing back in a performance of manic intensity.

36 CRABSODY IN BLUE
It's *The Jack*, Part II, another dirty blues, the subject of which was laid out in that punning title. You can almost feel the itch as Bon croons: 'Well they moved on down, and they crawled around.' Included on the original *Let There Be Rock*, it was later replaced by *Problem Child*.

35 WHAT'S NEXT TO THE MOON
This deep cut from *Powerage* has a seriously badass riff and a wickedly funny lyric from Bon with references to Superman and Casey Jones. 'I didn't mean to hurt that woman of mine,' he protests. "It was a heart attack."

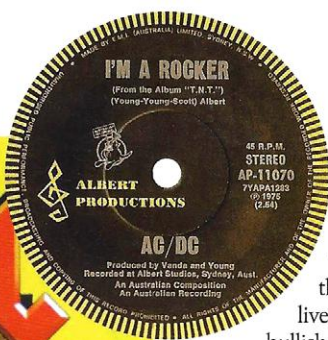
34 OVERDOSE
The unsung classic from *Let There Be Rock* is not a drug story as the title might imply, but one of sexual obsession: "I overdosed on you." It begins in shambolic fashion – a false start and a bum note – but once the Young brothers are lock in it all coalesces into a thing of hypnotic power.

33 GIMME A BULLET
On the *Powerage* album AC/DC made it all sound so easy, and no more so than on this track. Nothing fancy, just a great rock'n'roll band playing a great rock'n'roll song.

32 GIRLS GOT RHYTHM
Of all the raunchy songs this band recorded, this is the raunchiest. Bon boasted of the girl in question: 'She's enough to start a landslide/Just a-walkin' down the street.' The 'back-seat rhythm' he referred to is replicated in a bouncing, bump-and-grind riff.

31 KICKED IN THE TEETH

Powerage's last track is a real bruiser. It starts with Bon, alone, howling in indignation: 'Two-face woman with your two-face lies!' Between volleys of power chords and some aching blues licks from Angus, the singer lays it on thick: 'Told me baby I was your only one/While you been runnin' round town with every mother's son.' And when the band piles in behind him it's mayhem. From such a noted swordsman as Bon, who had at least one girl in every town, there's a whiff of hypocrisy here. But every word was delivered with utter conviction.



29 IF YOU WANT BLOOD (YOU'VE GOT IT)

The title was so great that they used it for their 1978 live album and also for this bullish track from *Highway To Hell*: a song pumped up with a violent energy and full of piss and vinegar.

28 GET IT HOT

From *Highway To Hell*, it's about cruisin' and boozin' – two and a half minutes of pure groove propelled by a floor-shaking bass line. It also has Bon taking a swipe at the big-nosed king of schmaltz, Barry Manilow. It was so typical of Bon: that sense of mischief that never left him.

27 ROCK 'N' ROLL SINGER

This was Bon sticking it to The Man: to 'nine-to-five livin', to 'moral standards', to 'silly rules' and, of course, to 'all the other shit that you teach to kids in school'. He was nearly 30 when the band recorded it in 1975, and he delivered it with the cockiness of a man who knew that his time had come. The final line is his funniest fuck-you: 'Gonna be a rock'n'roll star. Yes I are!'

26 JAILBREAK

Recorded in 1974 and first released two years later as an Aussie-only single, *Jailbreak* is a true cult classic. Powered by a stinging riff, it's the tale of a killer banged up and plotting his escape. There is no Hollywood ending: 'He made it out, with a bullet in his back!' Bon cries. According to George Young, Bon was so drunk when he cut it, and put so much into his performance, that he passed out at the end.

25 SHE'S GOT BALLS

This was the first song the band ever wrote with Bon, and its subject was his ex-wife. The title was not an insult; quite the opposite. There was genuine fondness in what he sang about her, albeit with a degree of candour she might not have appreciated: 'She's got balls, my lady/Likes to crawl, my lady/Hands and knees all around the floor/No one has to tell her what a fella is for.' This bawdy humour, coupled to a grinding boogie, is much-loved by the man who replaced Bon: Brian Johnson says it's his favourite AC/DC song.

24 NIGHT PROWLER

It was always sinister, this creepy blues song from *Highway To Hell*, on which Bon adopted the persona of a murderous

stalker. But in 1985, six years after that album was released, *Night Prowler* came back to haunt AC/DC. American serial killer Richard Ramirez – dubbed the Night Stalker – claimed after his arrest that it was this song that had driven him to commit 16 murders. Only when separated from this context can the song be viewed for what it really is: a deeply flawed yet immensely powerful piece of music. Angus never played a better blues solo than the one on *Night Prowler*. And for all the grisly imagery in the lyrics, the song ended with a weird joke, as Bon quoted alien language from 70s sitcom *Mork & Mindy*: 'Shazbot! Nanu nanu!'

23 UP TO MY NECK IN YOU

While the *Powerage* album has long been overshadowed by what came before and after it – *Let There Be Rock* and *Highway To Hell* – it is home to some of the band's most ass-kicking tracks. One such track is *Up To My Neck In You*: rock'n'roll as an all-out assault on the senses.

22 HIGH VOLTAGE

With its no-brainer mission-statement chorus – 'High voltage rock'n'roll' – this is one of the band's defining early songs, the title track for their second Australian album and also for their first international release. No frills, no bullshit, just heavy boogie. It ain't rocket science.

21 WALK ALL OVER YOU

It might be one of the lesser-known album tracks from *Highway To Hell*, but *Walk All Over You* is a monster. It starts at a crawl, with drummer Phil

Rudd ratcheting up the tension, then it all kicks off like a pub brawl. And if the title of this song suggested a Neanderthal attitude towards the fairer sex, there was a clever twist in Bon's sly payoff: 'I'm gonna walk all over you/Do anything you want me to.'

20 ROCK 'N' ROLL DAMNATION

On this rollicking lead-off track from *Powerage*, Bon delivered a classic put-down: 'You say that you want respect/Honey, for what?' On every level, it was a song that kicked ass

19 ROCKER

As Angus Young has always maintained, AC/DC are a rock'n'roll band, nothing more, nothing less. And this is their purest rock'n'roll song. It channels Chuck Berry in '246" of blistering ramalama, with Bon creating his own mythology in the opening line: 'I'm a rocker, roller, right-out-of-controller.'



"G'day, girls!" Hirsute howler Bon shows what he's made of

30

GO DOWN

It says a lot about AC/DC's brass balls that in 1977, at a key stage of their early career, they opened the *Let There Be Rock* album with a track as loose as *Go Down*. This is rock'n'roll in its most raw form. In the first few seconds the band are heard warming up, before being counted in by Bon. With the first big power chords there's a wail of feedback. And while the track is based around a hard, driving riff, it also breaks down midway through into a funky jam in which Bon and Angus play call-and-response with mock-orgasmic wailing. It's a song about blow jobs, after all.

**18 DOWN PAYMENT
BLUES**

Although he's remembered as a legendary rock star, Bon spent most of his 33 years living hand-to-mouth. As such he gave gritty authenticity to this song – in his lyrics, and in the way he sang them. From *Powerage*, this was not a blues song in the conventional sense, but over a relentless, visceral riff Bon laid out the harsh realities of a life on the breadline: 'Can't even feed my cat on social security.'

17 SIN CITY

It's *Powerage*'s most famous track, and for Aerosmith's Joe Perry the best thing AC/DC ever did. As implied, *Sin City* is a gambler's song, and in Bon's words there's a powerful sense of the danger and the thrill of it all: 'Spin that wheel, cut that pack and roll them loaded dice/Bring on the dancin' girls and put the champagne on ice.'

**16 SHOT DOWN
IN FLAMES**

For all his swinging-dick machismo, Bon could admit that even he got blown out sometimes. The title was self-explanatory, but this track had an undeniable groove.

15 T.N.T.

It was George Young who suggested that the band write a song with the chord progression: A, C, D, C. From this they created an anthem. The title track of their second Australian album, *T.N.T.* is hard rock with a hooligan mentality. The gang chant of 'Oi! Oi! Oi!' is idiotically brilliant.

14 BAD BOY BOOGIE

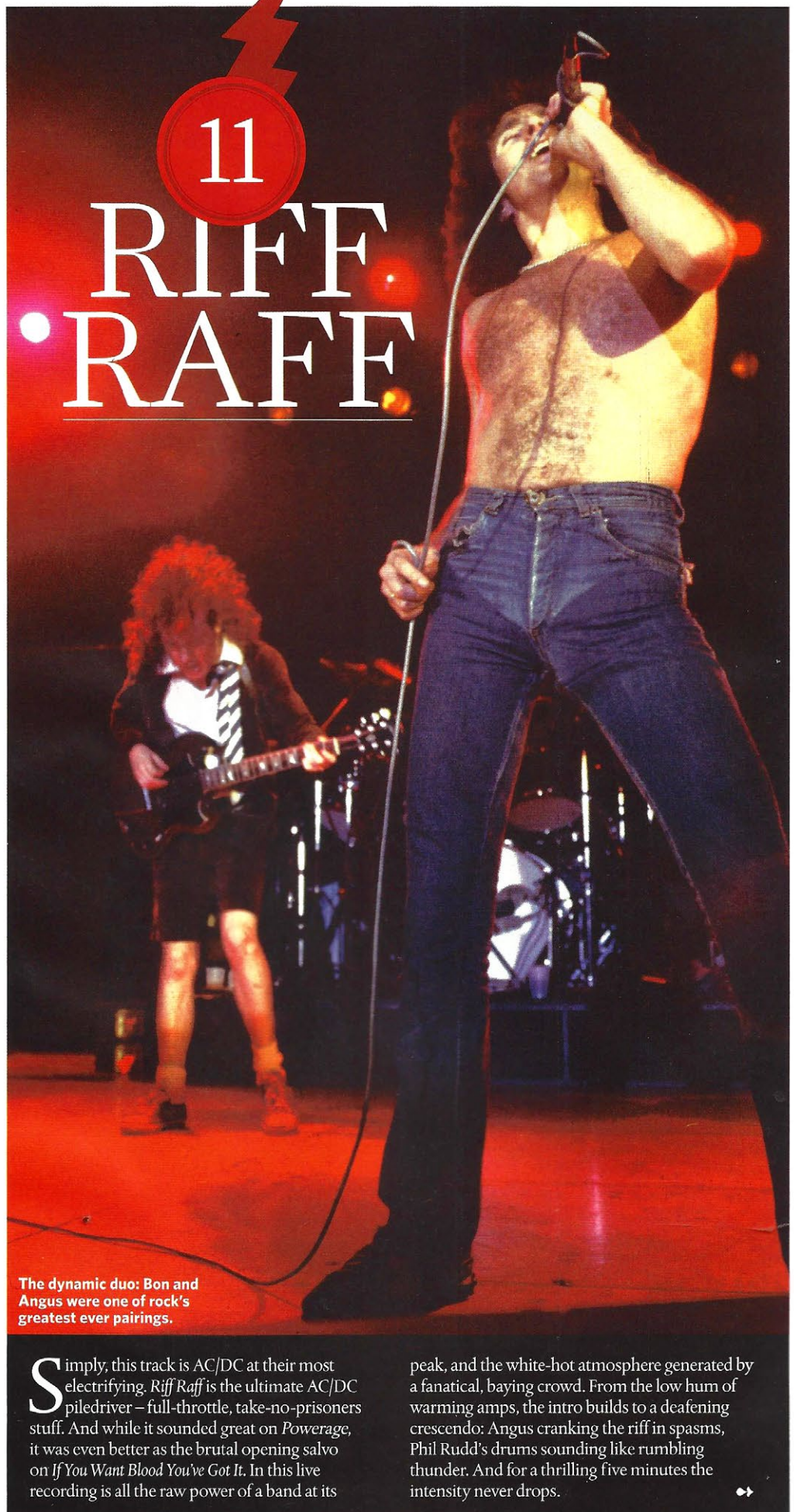
With a title that spoke volumes about the band and their rough-arsed sensibilities, this was one of many killer tracks on *Let There Be Rock*. But it was on stage that *Bad Boy Boogie* really came alive: extended to more than 10 minutes, with Angus hoisted on to Bon's shoulders and making like a motherfucker.

**13 DIRTY DEEDS DONE
DIRT CHEAP**

Bon loved to play the bad guy, and he did it best of all on this track from 1976. The riff sounds like a gunslinger riding into town, and Bon revels in the role of contract killer, with various means of disposal: 'Concrete shoes, cyanide, T.N.T....' It's a song that has taken on a whole new level of meaning following the arrest of Phil Rudd in 2014 on a threat to kill charge.

12 GONE SHOOTIN'

Keith Richards said of AC/DC's 1975 album *Powerage*: "The whole band means it, and you can hear it." *Gone Shootin'* is that album's best track and the funkiest they ever did. And it wasn't just the sound that kept dug. He would also have related to the subject matter: Bon's doomed relationship with a junkie girlfriend. The detail was in the detail, as he sang sadly: 'I stirred my coffee with the same spoon.'



The dynamic duo: Bon and Angus were one of rock's greatest ever pairings.

Simply, this track is AC/DC at their most electrifying. *Riff Raff* is the ultimate AC/DC piledriver – full-throttle, take-no-prisoners stuff. And while it sounded great on *Powerage*, it was even better as the brutal opening salvo on *If You Want Blood You've Got It*. In this live recording is all the raw power of a band at its

peak, and the white-hot atmosphere generated by a fanatical, baying crowd. From the low hum of warming amps, the intro builds to a deafening crescendo: Angus cranking the riff in spasms, Phil Rudd's drums sounding like rumbling thunder. And for a thrilling five minutes the intensity never drops.



If you want rockers, you got 'em: (l-r) Malcolm Young, Bon Scott, Cliff Williams, Angus Young, Phil Rudd.



10 THE JACK
It's not only the band's most celebrated blues track, it's also the best song ever written about venereal disease. It came to them in a flash of inspiration after Malcolm Young caught a dose of the clap—in Aussie parlance, 'the jack'—from a girl in Melbourne. Bon was well-versed in this subject: he was on first-name terms with the staff in his local VD clinic. His filthy lyrics were an extended pun on playing poker. 'If I'd know what she was dealin' out,' he growled, 'I'd have dealt it back.' Performed live, *The Jack* would be enlivened by a striptease from Angus. Even funnier is the studio cut, which ends as if played to a hostile club audience. Over the sound of boeing and catcalls, Bon exclaims: "Thank you! Glad you enjoyed the show!"

9 IT'S A LONG WAY TO THE TOP (IF YOU WANNA ROCK 'N' ROLL)
The song that introduced AC/DC to the world in 1976: the opening track on their international debut, *High Voltage*, which culled the best material from their first two Aussie albums. The crunching riff was the template for so much to follow, as was Bon's straight-talking, streetwise lyric. And in a nod to his and the Young brothers' Scottish roots he topped it off with a bagpipe solo. Somehow, it was a perfect fit.

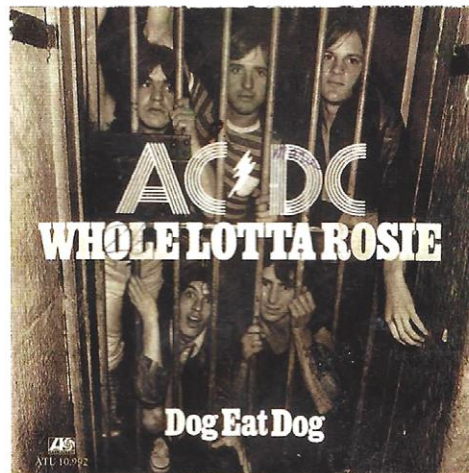
8 LIVE WIRE
There's a heavy vibe about *Live Wire*. Cut in 1975 for *T.N.T.*, it has an air of menace about it. The mood is set in the intro: a throbbing one-note bass line, guitars easing in slow, the hiss of a hi-hat pushing it along, and then everything locking together in a riff that's as mean as they come. It's the cue for Bon to play the hard man: 'Cooler than a body on ice/Hotter than a rolling dice.' Apart from a brief moment of levity—Bon's exclamation: 'Stick this in your fuse box!'—it's all bad vibes. For several years AC/DC opened their set with it. What that said was very simple: these guys weren't fucking around.

7 PROBLEM CHILD
A song so good they used it twice: first on *Dirty Deeds*, then on *Let There Be Rock*. The riff is a shit-kicker, the lyrics full of tough-guy bravado: 'With a flick of my knife I can change your life.' The version on *Dirty Deeds* is the best, with a false ending that's brilliantly off-the-cuff.

6 HELL AIN'T A BAD PLACE TO BE
A fixture in the band's live set for almost 40 years, this is archetypal AC/DC, with its bumping riff and witty story of a girl who gave Bon the runaround, spending his money and, worst of all, drinking his booze. For such a great song it was strange that it was recorded for the *Let There Be Rock* album with guitars out of tune and the whole thing sounds off-kilter. It was with the live version, on *If You Want Blood*, that they totally nailed it.

5 RIDE ON
If there is one song on which Bon Scott bared his soul, it's this melancholy blues from *Dirty Deeds*. He loved to brag about all the women he'd had, but in *Ride On* he reflected on the loneliness of a life on the road: 'Got another empty bottle/And another empty bed.' It's AC/DC's deepest song. More than that, it's the most honest song ever recorded by a rock'n'roll band.

4 TOUCH TOO MUCH
The hit single from *Highway To Hell* proved that AC/DC and producer Mutt Lange were made for each other. On previous albums the production team of Harry Vanda and George Young—former stars of Aussie rock group The Easybeats; George the elder brother of Malcolm and Angus—



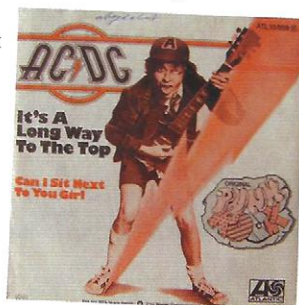
did a great job in making AC/DC sound like the baddest rock'n'roll band in the world. But what the band found in Lange was someone who could get their songs on the radio without cutting off their balls. And with *Touch Too Much* it all came together. A great song, with lyrics that were vintage Bon: 'She had the face of an angel, smiling with sin/The body of Venus with arms.' And what the producer brought to it—in the way the chorus and backing vocals punched through—just took

it to a whole new level.



3 LET THERE BE ROCK
On, this, the title track from their first classic album, AC/DC were on fire—literally, when Angus's amp went up in flames during the recording of this rock'n'roll sermon, delivered by Bon with missionary zeal; in a rudimentary promo he wore a priest's collar. And in 1977—famously recorded as the year of punk rock—this was a song that separated the men from the boys.

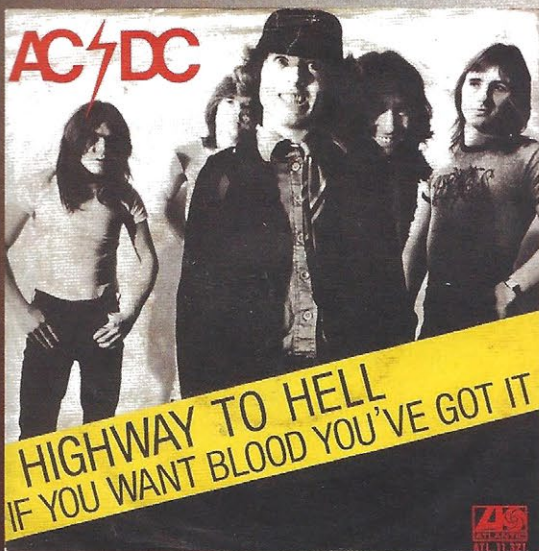
2 WHOLE LOTTA ROSIE
When *Classic Rock's* Geoff Barton launched a new heavy metal magazine in 1981—named, of course, *Kerrang!*—it featured a poll of the 100 greatest heavy metal tracks of all time, as voted for by the public. At No. 1, ahead of *Stairway To Heaven*, *Free Bird*, *Smoke On The Water* and *Stargazer*, was *Whole Lotta Rosie*. The original version of the song was on *Let There Be Rock*. But the definitive version is on the live album *If You Want Blood You've Got It*, where the first blasts of riffing are interspersed with chants of "Angus! Angus!" from a rowdy Glaswegian audience. But if the song is legendary, so is the story that inspired it: Bon's grapple with a heavyweight groupie. As Angus recalled: "Rosie was from Tasmania, and she was no skinny puppy. She dragged Bon off to bed, and he done his duty, so to speak."



Devil-clad devil: Bon on stage in his element and in his peacock pomp.

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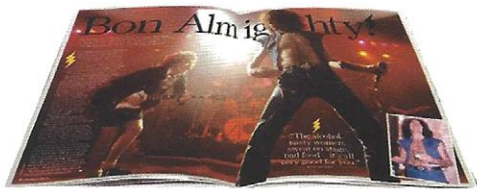
Highway To Hell



It's not just AC/DC's greatest song. It's the ultimate rock anthem, period. And for the man who sang it, *Highway To Hell* would become an epitaph: a defining statement of devil-may-care rock'n'roll attitude from a legendary hellraiser. The genius of *Highway To Hell* is its simplicity: a staccato riff, a thumping beat and a route-one chorus. When Angus Young came up with that riff, his brother Malcolm knew it was something special. "There were hundreds of riffs going down every day," Mal said. "But this one, we thought: 'That's good.' It just stuck out like a dog's balls." The song's title also came from Angus. Asked to describe the band's 1978 tour, he said: "It's a fucking highway to hell." And Bon ran with it in a lyric that raised two fingers to the so-called moral majority: 'Hey Satan, payin' my dues/Playin' in a rockin' band/Hey mama, look at me/I'm on my way to the promised land.' *Highway To Hell* was the title track for the last album that Bon Scott ever made. In this song, more than any other, his spirit lives on.



Bon Scott



Continued from page 36

With her croaky junkie voice, bleary smile and tough-cookie demeanour, Silver was no pushover. She was hard in a way so-called hard men like Bon Scott could never be. “She was part of Bon’s world,” says Michael Browning, AC/DC’s former manager, “but she certainly wasn’t part of the band’s world. She was looked upon as being a negative influence.”

A more positive influence on the wayward singer in those final years was that of Ian Jeffery. “We would be hanging out just talking bullshit,” he says now. “Bon was a sociable guy, whereas with Malcolm and Angus it was maybe a hello or a grunt every now and again. Bon would want to have conversations, want to do different things. Bon would have friends and acquaintances all over the place. He would write hundreds and hundreds of postcards. He was always off down the post office, posting cards to people he’d met once or twice, along with people that were really good friends of his.”

For Jeffery, who would go on to work with Def Leppard, Ozzy Osbourne and U2, Bon was simply the greatest frontman there ever was. “These were the days of absolutely no technology. And most of the gigs Bon did with AC/DC, at least in America, were always opening for other big bands. So he had a job on his hands every single night and he just killed it. They would have no idea who the band was, but by the end Bon had them eating out of the palm of his hands.”

As Joe Perry told one American writer after AC/DC had just blown Aerosmith off the stage in 1979: “Bon had so many miles on him. You could tell when he sang... he was there, man.” Or as Bon himself said in 1978: “We just want to make the walls cave in and the ceiling collapse... Music is meant to be played as loudly as possible, really raw and punchy, and I’ll punch out anyone who doesn’t like it the way I do.”

The final world tour of 1979/80 found Bon Scott on the edge of the abyss, physically, mentally. For the first time, Angus, who had always looked up to Bon and loved him, began to openly fret. Malcolm, unsure whether to pull the trigger or not, chose to look the other way for now, but had decided on a reckoning when the tour was over.

“Bon was in rough shape,” their American agent Doug Thaler recalls. “He was drunk most of the time or sleeping it off. He was starting to have a real problem. The last time I saw him [was] the last date on that tour in Chicago. I saw him at the hotel in the afternoon. He was so drunk he could barely stand up. He didn’t acknowledge me. He had a couple of chicks with him, but he was in very rough shape for broad daylight. And I know the guys were starting to have problems with him by that time because of that reason.”

You get a flavour of just how worn out Bon Scott was in the film shot in Paris by French filmmakers Eric Dionysius and Eric Mistler, released a year later

as the in-concert movie *AC/DC: Let There Be Rock*. In it, Bon looks every one of his 33 years. And although he smiles for the camera and appears to put on a fair show for the French audience, the poses are not even ironic, merely rote, the inevitable plastic white cup full of whisky glued to his hand, his movements stiff as though in pain.

When the world tour finally ended Bon was so floored he slept for most of the 26-hour flight home, waking only to pick at the in-flight meal and guzzle as many free miniature bottles of scotch and bourbon as he could stay awake for. Back in Australia, exhausted and still drinking heavily, he spent the three-day Christmas weekend at his parents’ home in Perth. It was the first time in three years he had been home.

Like the rest of his friends, Bon’s parents Isa and Chick couldn’t help noticing how much their son’s drinking had escalated. But then New Year – Scottish Hogmanay – was always a time of drinking into the night and next morning.

Flying back to London in January 1980, Bon didn’t feel rested so much as spaced out, Sydney already seeming more like a dream. The first thing he did when he returned was arrange to finally get his own flat in London. Silver lent him a few sticks

‘Bon had this thing in his mind where he was never going to get old.’

Fifa Riccobono

of furniture, knickknacks and kitchen utensils, to help him move in without too much hassle.

In the days before he died, Bon made phone calls to old friends and acquaintances, in some cases people he hadn’t seen for years. Among them were Michael Browning, Doug Thaler, Irene. No one says they got a sense of anything wrong.

“He always had this thing in his mind that he was never going to grow old,” says Fifa Riccobono. “I spoke to him literally days before he passed away and he was incredibly excited. He said that he’d just been with Malcolm and Angus, and he’d been listening to some of the things they’d been writing for the new album, some of the riffs. He said, ‘Fifa, wait until you hear this, it’s going to be brilliant, a fantastic album.’ In my mind, he was going in the studio three or four days later. So when I heard he’d passed away, I found it really hard to accept.”

How the greatest rock’n’roll frontman of them all died has long been the source of conjecture: too much of this, too much of that, a touch too much of everything. Ian Jeffery vividly recalls getting a phone call at 2.30 in the morning from a distraught Malcolm Young: “Bon’s fucking dead.” He remembers arriving at the hospital with the band’s new manager, Peter Mensch, at 6.30am, still unable to believe that the singer was gone, half-expecting to find Bon had somehow survived – yet again.

The *Evening Standard* broke the news: left in a car to sleep off a night of heavy drinking by a musician friend, Bon was found unconscious the following evening and pronounced DOS at the hospital. Police said there were no suspicious circumstances. It was this silted information that formed the

backbone of every story subsequently printed around the world, and to which much of the official version of Bon Scott’s death is still attributed today. Just like his life, Bon’s death – shrouded in secrecy and rumour – would become a figment of someone else’s rock’n’roll fantasy.

Speaking in 2010, Silver Smith claimed: “He died of major organ failure... the doctor’s report said that his organs were like those of a sixty-year-old man.” But no one else I have spoken to who was there can recall any similar “doctor’s report”.

Ian Jeffery snorts with derision when I mention it to him. “If Bon had been seeing a doctor, I’d have known. I never saw any notes or prescriptions, never took him to any appointments.” In fact, according to the autopsy Bon’s liver and general health were actually in reasonable condition.

Thirty-five years later, it hardly matters. It’s really not Bon Scott’s death we should be remembering him for, but his extraordinary life.

“It keeps you fit, the alcohol, nasty women, sweat on stage, bad food – it’s all very good for you!” Bon had proclaimed in 1979. Except of course it wasn’t. Good for the ego, maybe, no good at all for body and soul, as Bon discovered.

“I always felt that he was still out on the road after he passed away,” says Fifa Riccobono. “I still feel like he’s out on tour. I’ll see a video and I can remember exactly where we were when we did it. He’s left that legacy that you watch him on-screen and you see that grin, it’s as if he’s still there.”

The real tragedy is that, had he lived, Bon Scott might just have gone on to a better way of life. In private, stoned and tired and unable to see past the next day, he talked of “getting out”. Of maybe one more album with AC/DC and then back to Australia and a house up in the hills; a home with a wife and some “ankle-biters”.

Other times he talked of doing a solo album. Of maybe teaming up with some of the old Adelaide gang like Peter Head. In the days before his time with Peter and the Rangers turned sour, Bon and Peter had written some great stuff: the gentle *Carey Gully*, a sweet blend of Gram Parsons-inspired country and Celtic roots folk, based on the small town of the same name in the Adelaide Hills where Bon then lived. Its opening verse gives a wonderful glimpse of how life might have been for Bon if AC/DC had never come along, and of where he might have gone when it was over: “You go on down Piggy Lane through the flowers/That paint the hills as far as you can see/And that’s where I while away my hours/Hours of eternity/In a little tin shed on the hillside/Where we sit and drink our peppermint tea...”

How long that kind of peaceful feeling would have kept him happy is harder to guess. Another song he wrote with Peter, the autobiographical *Been Up In The Hills Too Long*, describes the frustrations of the born traveller waylaid too long by family commitments: “Well, I feel like an egg that ain’t been laid/I feel like a bill that ain’t been paid/I feel like a giant that ain’t been slayed/I feel like a saying that ain’t been said/Well, I don’t think things can get much worse/I feel my life is in reverse... I been up in the hills too long...”

That was Bon Scott. Too far up or too deep down. Not even he knew what was going to happen next. That’s why AC/DC loved him. And still miss him so. 🍷

Mick Wall’s AC/DC: Hell Ain’t A Bad Place To Be is out now in paperback and on Kindle.