

COMMON WISDOM HAS IT that Sheffield rock band Def Leppard were a commercial flop before their third album, 1983's 'Pyromania', rescued them from oblivion. The truth is more nuanced. The band's second release, 1981's 'High 'N' Dry', had already seen the group hooking up with mega-producer Robert John 'Mutt' Lange, who was hot off the back of helming AC/DC's insanely successful 'Back In Black' album. Equally as importantly, 'High 'N' Dry' had helped Leppard make some headway in the commercially important territory of the United States, climbing to a more-than-respectable number 38 on the *Billboard* charts. Def Leppard weren't global megastars. Far from it. But they were nicely positioned to go to the next level if they could make a brilliant third album.

The five band members who completed the album – vocalist Joe Elliott, bassist Rick Savage, drummer Rick Allen, and guitarists Steve Clark and Phil Collen – certainly dedicated themselves to the work. 'Pyromania' took fully 11 months to make, which was an eternity even at a time when making albums was a much more convoluted process than it is today. But the results were undeniably spectacular. 'Pyromania' was released on 20 January 1983 and soon picked up a head of steam thanks to MTV-friendly first single 'Photograph'. 1983 became the year Def Leppard moved up to enormo-status. At its height, 'Pyromania' was selling 100,000 copies a week in the States, and was only held off top slot on the *Billboard* charts by the phenomenon that was Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'. The album would go on to be certified 10-times platinum in the US alone, with sales of over 10 million.

There were bumps in the road, though, the most obvious being the departure of guitarist Pete Willis because



of a drink problem while 'Pyromania' was still being completed. Girl guitarist Phil Collen came in to add his own brand of guitar fire to the album before being quickly enlisted as a full-time member of the band. Nice timing.

Having recently released a bumper edition of 'Pyromania' featuring a remastered version of the original album, a bunch of rarities, and some live performances from 1983, Rick Savage and Phil Collen sat down with *Rock Candy Mag* to discuss the evolution of one of the most successful rock albums of all time...

PHIL, WHEN DEF LEPPARD STARTED RECORDING 'PYROMANIA' YOU WERE STILL IN GIRL, RIGHT?

PHIL COLLEN: "That's right, but I knew the Leppard guys pretty well already. Girl was touring either with UFO or Pat Travers, I can't remember which.

We played in Sheffield, met the Leppard boys and [Girl singer] Phil Lewis and I ended up jamming with them at a small club called Genevieve. Joe was on drums! We went back to Joe's house, and Phil and I slept in the spare room. I remember the next morning Joe's mum was shocked because there was make-up on the pillows because Girl was a very glammy band!

So we got friendly, and Joe and Steve would stay at my mum's place in Walthamstow whenever they came down to London. Joe and I had very similar rock collections. We both had the first Montrose album when nobody in England had heard of them. Then one time when Leppard were on tour in America I got a call from Joe. He said there was some stuff going down with Pete Willis and drinking that wasn't good. He asked me to learn 16 songs in two days and come out to the States. But then a couple of days later he phoned again and said things had been smoothed out. I was like, 'OK, fine, no problem.'

THERE'S A CERTAIN MYTHOLOGY SURROUNDING 'PYROMANIA' THAT SUGGESTS DEF LEPPARD WERE GOING

NOWHERE BEFORE IT WAS RELEASED. BUT THAT'S NOT ENTIRELY TRUE IS IT?

RICK SAVAGE: "It isn't. The previous album, 'High 'N' Dry', had done OK and had established some of our band principles as it was our first album with Mutt. He brought a focus to the band because before he was involved we were five individuals just doing their own thing. That was cool, because when you're teenagers that's what you should be doing. But when Mutt came in he brought focus and energy to everything. As much as we liked 'High 'N' Dry' at the time, and as much as we thought it was the right record to make, when we started the 'Pyromania' album we knew we wanted to expand on what we'd done. Not from a sales point of view, because we weren't really thinking about that. But musically we wanted to make a step forward. We didn't want to lose the energy or the band's essential guitar sound, but we did want to develop, create more of a production, and spend a lot more time honing the songs. That started with the writing process. Mutt was far more hands on at the start of 'Pyromania', especially with how the melodies and the vocals were going to be."



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WAS THERE EVER ANY DOUBT THAT MUTT WOULD PRODUCE 'PYROMANIA'?

SAV: "No. At that point in time Mutt was highly in demand and had already established himself. He had nothing to prove, whereas we still felt we were climbing the ladder. So working with him was a no brainer for us. But what was important for Mutt was that after working with us on 'High 'N' Dry' he saw that there was still untapped potential. He wanted to make a different kind of rock record the same way we did."

DIFFERENT HOW?

SAV: "Right from when we first started, Joe and I had a vision of how we ultimately wanted to sound; highly produced, over the top, in your face, everything sounding large, a rock band that did harmonies and melodies. When Queen played hard rock in their early days, that was what we wanted to do, but with a little more of

the definition that bands like AC/DC had. Those were our two groups, and we were trying to get a combination of them. Mutt had a vision that matched ours and 'Pyromania' was where we all felt we were ready to implement that vision."

DO YOU THINK IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT YOU WERE ALL SO YOUNG AT THE TIME – TEENAGERS AND GUYS IN YOUR EARLY 20S – BECAUSE YOU WERE OPEN TO THAT LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT FROM A MORE EXPERIENCED PRODUCER?

SAV: "Absolutely. It's hard to know how we would have reacted had we been six or seven years older. But we were still young enough and respectful enough to be open to new ideas. Mutt knew how to get what we had in our minds onto tape, and we were prepared to do anything to achieve that. We were young and enthusiastic and willing to go back to ground zero. It sounds elementary, but Mutt really opened my eyes to what it was to actually play in time. When you first start out you *think* you're playing in time, but you're just there or thereabouts. But once you start getting really focused, once you've got the solidity, that's when you can start building on the colour. That really hit me because I'd always thought I was relatively good at timekeeping."

WAS EVERYBODY IN THE BAND HUMBLE ENOUGH TO ACCEPT THAT THEY STILL HAD A LONG WAY TO GO AS MUSICIANS?

SAV: "Definitely. We've always had that attitude and we still have it today, that no matter how good you're told you are, or how good you think you are, you can always be better. I've always believed that bands with longevity have that humility. It would have been easy for us to go, 'No, no that's fine. What's wrong with you? I'm not doing that again.' But Mutt taught us to be really objective and to understand that putting an extra three hours of work in could make all the difference. We developed a real work ethic."

WAS MUTT INVOLVED IN 'PYROMANIA' RIGHT



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