



# HELL'S KITCHEN



Legendary rock producer **Tony Platt** (left) is the man who cooked up the excellent mix for 'Highway To Hell' and is in a unique position to open up a window into the fascinating world of **AC/DC** back in 1979, in those important days just before the world caught on to the band. Interview by *Howard Johnson*.

**IF YOU, LIKE ME,** obsessed over the minutiae of the recording details on the sleeve of every rock album you bought when you were a kid, then the name of Tony Platt will be more than familiar to you. For many years in the '70s and '80s the Englishman seemed to pop up with incredible regularity either as an engineer, a mixer, or a producer on the cream of rock releases. After cutting his teeth at the studio of Island Records in London – his first session was as an assistant engineer on Mott The Hoople's 1971 album 'Wildlife' – Tony went freelance and was soon in demand working with artists as diverse as The Stranglers and Thin Lizzy. However, his big break came when emerging South African producer Robert John 'Mutt' Lange, who'd started to earn an industry reputation for his work with City Boy and The Boomtown Rats, called Platt to ask him if he'd be interested in mixing an album titled 'Highway To Hell' by an Australian rock band called AC/DC. Little did Tony know that by accepting a job that would take less than two weeks to accomplish, he was writing his name into rock history. It's not an exaggeration to say that AC/DC's sixth studio album, released on 27 July 1979, has come to be recognised as one of the greatest hard rock albums ever made. It's a fact that the 10 songs on the record kickstarted the five-piece band's journey from commercially workmanlike act to one of the most successful and enduring rock outfits of all time. It may surprise you to know that the group's previous studio recording – the connoisseur's choice 'Powerage', released in the US on 25 May 1978 – only crawled to number 133 on the all-important *Billboard* US album chart. In contrast, 'Highway To Hell', the first 'DC album to be produced by Lange and mixed by Platt, changed the game, peaking at number 17 in the US, eventually selling over eight million units in the States alone, and putting AC/DC front and centre as a commercial juggernaut to be truly reckoned with.

What was it that caused such a seismic shift in the band's fortunes? Well, there's no doubt that Mutt Lange

must take the lion's share of the credit for pulling off an incredible trick of the light. Thanks to an obsessive attention to detail, an intuitive understanding of what makes music – *any* kind of music – commercially appealing, and an ability to drag performances out of musicians that even *they* would have doubted themselves capable of, Lange was able to supercharge any band to give it wider appeal while always retaining the group's DNA in their updated sound. But nobody should underestimate Tony Platt's mixing work on 'Highway To Hell', which cleverly knitted the band's signature sound into a new pattern that gave the songs warmth, depth, and charm.

**"AC/DC'S MUSIC WASN'T ALL BLACK JEANS AND BLACK T-SHIRTS. THEIR MUSIC HAD A CERTAIN LIGHTNESS AND A MELODIC STRUCTURE TO IT THAT WAS QUITE SPECIAL. MUTT BOTH IDENTIFIED THAT AND BROUGHT IT OUT IN THE PRODUCTION OF 'HIGHWAY TO HELL'."**

Despite its stellar success, 'Highway To Hell' wasn't AC/DC's commercial highpoint. The band's next album, 1980's 'Back In Black' – again produced by Lange and engineered by Platt –

was recorded in the darkest of circumstances after the untimely and unexpected death by misadventure of the band's singer Bon Scott in London on 9 February 1980. Despite the difficult situation behind the recording, 'Back In Black' became by far the biggest hard rock album ever recorded with a staggering *31 million* copies sold to date.

"There are definitely two factions amongst the world's AC/DC fans," laughs Platt. "There's the 'Highway To Hell' cohort and the 'Back In Black' faction. I've been in the middle of the debate about which is the better of those two records, and let me tell you it can get pretty heated."

But no matter which of the two albums you prefer, there's no doubt that 'Highway To Hell' turned the tide for Scott, guitarist brothers Angus and Malcolm Young, drummer Phil Rudd, and bassist Cliff Williams. We at *Rock Candy Mag* salute this classic album and are delighted that Tony Platt agreed to give us a unique insider's view into that special sauce he helped create, a special sauce that resulted in an album for the ages...

**TONY, CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOUR WORLD FIRST COLLIDED WITH MUTT LANGE'S?**

Photo: IconicPbx/Dalle/Eric Mistler