

JOE ELLIOTT

The **Def Leppard** frontman goes super deep on the band's long, long live history, from a debut gig in a school hall to stadium-straddling world tours that show no signs of slowing down...

NOBODY CAN ARGUE AGAINST the theory that Def Leppard changed the world of rock when they teamed up for the second time with Mutt Lange for their 1983 breakthrough third album 'Pyromania'. The South African producer had heard something in the Sheffield band's youthful approach to hard rock, and their multi-faceted record collections, that convinced him that together they could create a sound that would take hard rock out of the realms of 'for dyed-in-the-wool rockers only' and into an almost endlessly broader spectrum of appreciation. Meticulous attention to sonic detail, utilising new technologies to create brighter, shinier, more modern sounds, led to 'Pyromania' breaking the mould. Songs such as 'Photograph' and 'Rock Of Ages' certainly sat under the umbrella of rock, but no rock you'd ever heard before. This proved to be catnip to US radio programmers, who backed 'Pyromania' to the hilt and helped it rack up an astonishing 10 million sales in the United States alone.

All of this happened when the oldest member of the group was just 25, and American girls couldn't get enough of vocalist Joe Elliott, guitarists Steve Clark and Phil Collen, bassist Rick 'Sav' Savage, and drummer Rick Allen. Their fresh faces allowed Def Leppard to help themselves to a very large slice of the burgeoning music TV market on MTV, which did their cause no harm at all.

"We never thought of ourselves as attractive," laughs Joe Elliott when we catch up today, fully 33 years after 'Pyromania' mania first took hold and turned the young men of Def Leppard into superstars. "We always thought of ourselves as an ugly Duran Duran. We looked like a proper rock band, not ugly, not pretty, but somewhere right in the middle. And I think that really helped, because the pretty boys were all loved on the US West Coast, and the ugly ones were great for the middle of the country, but we were good everywhere."

The thing is, though, while sound and image served Def Leppard remarkably well, there was another more traditional ingredient that also made a major contribution to the band's runaway success. Leppard toured constantly, anywhere and everywhere, just like their musical heroes Queen and AC/DC before them. Taking the music to the people was the hammer and nails that provided Leppard with solid foundations and proved there was more substance to their art than studio wizardry and some young, semi-pretty faces. So as the band now closes in on 50 years of live work, we're here to celebrate Def Leppard in all of their glory, but

particularly in the context of live performance. As usual, Joe Elliott is both amenable and engaging, more than ready to discuss almost half a century of gigging activity, from the smallest clubs in the band's native England to the biggest arenas worldwide. Amazingly, there are still virgin territories that the band - with guitarist Viv Campbell replacing Steve Clark, who died aged just 30 in 1991 - are only now starting to explore.

"We got back from India not that long ago," Joe tells me. "It's the first time ever that we've played a gig there and it was absolutely brilliant. They were like shows in parks, all pretty much sold out, between 10 and 15,000 people. And what surprised me the most was the fact that it was a really young crowd. Trust me, at 66 I'm well aware of how old I am! But the majority of people watching us were way under 30. I was wondering whether we were at the right gig. Maybe they'd mistaken us for some kind of K-pop band!"

I think you might just be safe on that front, Joe...

JOE, YOU PLAYED YOUR FIRST EVER GIG AS DEAF LEOPARD ON 18 JULY 1978 AT WESTFIELD SCHOOL IN MOSBOROUGH NEAR SHEFFIELD. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER OF IT?

"Probably more than I can remember about the last gig we played to be honest! It's funny how that works, isn't it? It was me, Sav, Steve Clark and Pete Willis on guitar, and a guy called Tony Kenning on drums. We had two mates, Ian Flint and Andy Smith, who both had access to their parents' cars, which were hatchbacks where you could get the back seats folded down, so we could just about get our gear in. I seem to remember that there wasn't enough room for the gear *and* the band, though, so some of us had to get the bus! We'd been doing quite a bit of rehearsing at a place called The Spoon Factory since first getting together in August of 1977, and we'd done a couple of glorified rehearsals there in front of maybe 10 or 12 mates to see what they thought of us. The first song we ever played together was a cover of David Bowie's 'Suffragette City', the version from [1974 album] 'David Live', not the version on [1972's] 'The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars', because Steve had a bit of a thing for Earl Slick [the guitarist who played on the live album]. We toyed with things like 'Rock And Roll' [by Led Zeppelin], 'Rock 'N' Roll Susie' by Pat Travers, 'Hot Blooded' by Foreigner, and a few things by Thin Lizzy like 'Emerald', 'Rosalie', and 'Jailbreak'. But we stopped concentrating on