



REXUS

AC/DC

THE  
RAZORS  
EDGE

# AC/DC still on high voltage

back to assault the senses

Are you ready for a good time? Then you've come to the right place.

*The Razor Edge* is a prime slice of AC/DC: all killer riffs and tough-as-nails rumpsteers. Nor is there any lack of the lads' signature, slyly subliminal lyrics trucking on the eternal virtues: hard liquor, cheap sex, fast money and the endless quest for a good time. Like all AC/DC albums, *The Razor Edge* is designed to rock you. But beyond that, the 1991 release marked a pivotal point in the long and eventful career of rock's most enduring riot brigade.

Rock was running rudderless at the dawn of the Nineties. Hair metal was on the wane, Punk was just a memory, and still years away from revival as a commercial formula. But AC/DC had just completed a look-heavy album that would



once said that if you wanted to scare the you should forget the arsenal of the United States and send an Australian metal band AC/DC. Someone did two weeks on the pursuit of Australia's most rock band

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catapult them to new heights. *The Razor Edge* contains two tracks — “Thunderstruck” and “Moneytalks” — that would turn out to be all-time AC/DC anthems and reestablish the band’s rightful place of honor on rock radio. Once again, AC/DC weathered the vicissitudes of rock fashion by sticking to their guns.

“We started as a rock and roll band,” says Angus Young, the man with the schoolboy suit and cannon fire guitar riffs. “Rock and roll is what we play best and we never

claimed to be anything else. In the middle 70s they called us a folk band. And in the 80s they lumped us in as heavy metal, which offended me more than the punk thing. Over the years, they’ve had other names for us too, like power pop.”

“You put all those names together,” adds singer Brian Johnson, “and it spells bulls\*\*t.”

And that is one substance in which AC/DC has never trafficked.

The boys unquestionably had a bagful of great songs circa 1989 when they repaired to Little Mountain Studios in Vancouver, British Columbia to cut *The Razor Edge* with the late, legendary rock producer Bruce Fairbairn. Consider, for instance, the opening track. With “Thunderstruck’s” frenetic hammer-on guitar riff, its tension-and-release dynamics and football hooligan chant

(“Thun-DEE!”), is it any wonder that the song has become a staple of AC/DC’s live shows? It is custom-made for the big arena and clammy rock and roll sheds, building incessantly on a simple B major tonal base, achieving maximum thrust before collapsing exhausted in a wind-down ritardando. Like nearly every great AC/DC song, “Thunderstruck” was written by Angus in collaboration with his brother, and AC/DC’s rhythm guitarist, Malcolm — rock guitar’s greatest one-two punch.

"It started off from a little trick that I had on guitar," Angus recalls. "I played it to Mal and he said, 'Oh I've got a good rhythm idea that will sit well in the back.' We built the song up from that. We fiddled about with it for a few months before everything fell into place."

Literally, Angus adds, "It was really just a case of finding a good title, something along the lines of 'Powerage' or 'Highway To Hell.' We came up with this thunder thing and it seemed to have a good ring to it. AC/DC - Power. That's the basic idea."

Who could argue with that? Especially with bassist Cliff Williams and drummer Chris Slade down in the boiler room. The chrome-domed, veteran stickman made his first appearance as a member of AC/DC on *The Razor Edge*.

And then there's Brian Johnson.... A decade earlier, Johnson had replaced the late, great Bon Scott as AC/DC's lead singer, making a strong debut on the legendary *Back In Black*. And by the time *The Razor Edge* came



It's a long way to retirement for the bad — and good — men of rock.

out, Johnson had become — with no disrespect to Scott — the voice of AC/DC for many fans. And what a voice. An ungodly marriage of croak and shriek — like the sound of some nasty little maggie with its mind in the gutter. How can the human larynx produce such a sound?

"Well, what you do is get a track and drop it on your foot," suggests Angus.

"Oh, there isn't any secret," Brian demurs. "When you're singing with AC/DC and everybody's shrieking away 100%, it just comes natural. As long and Mal have always said, the voice can be like another instrument. Rather than just standing in the front

of the band.

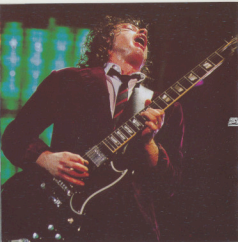
By then, neither Angus or Young will have been mostly seen the rest of his life. (The band split in 1983, though they reunited in 1999.)



AC/DC

# Rock legends turn on live





**ROCK**



...his hips like a big nut, the singer can contribute to the sound of the band."

Johnson confesses himself to the leering seduction that is "Moneytalks." He promises particular delight in a lyrical role as a rich gal trying to love some money with the stroke of his wallet. And if "Thunderstruck" is a prime example of AC/DC's riff-driven style, "Moneytalks" beautifully combines the bloody hip maching with the AC/DC. The intro guitar riff morphs into giddy, slog-along choruses more infectious than a dose of "the Jack."

"We never wanted to be a singles band," says Malcolm. "And we refused to be anywhere near that. But there are a few great riffs that just sing themselves."

The *Back in Black* tracks are the same that Angus and Malcolm wrote the songs entirely on their own — an arrangement that couldn't be this day. A different source had suggested Johnson from



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In usual role as co-lyricist, but the brothers Young managed to carry the torch proudly. AC/DC's celebrated penchant for double entendre is alive and well on *The Razor Edge*. It is doubtful, for instance, whether the discharge they have in mind on "For Your Guns" has anything to do with artillery.

"With AC/DC sometimes the only new thing is the musicians," Angus muses. "Somebody once said, 'Thank goodness they never write Guts.' Think what

they would have called it?" Lyrics are a bit like jokes. Any comedian can get a laugh saying "F\*\*k." But the really funny guys are the ones who can get onstage and not use a dirty word, but you think they have. You think it's a blue joke but it's not. That to me is clever."

On the other hand, "Mistress For Christmas" isn't exactly "Frosty, The Snowman." Nor is it likely to turn up on the many compilations of family Christmas

favorites. One can only hope that Santa granted Johnson's wish for "a woman to ride at the bottom of [his] belt."

"Get You By The Balls" is hardly subtle either. Lyrically, it repeats the "Mincefucker" theme of "Love for Sale," this time casting Johnson as a pimp hawking female flesh — another role the singer attacks with particular relish.

Fans of the mill-driven arena rock AC/DC will find plenty to love on *The Razor Edge* — from the disc's dramatic, Sanremo-influenced title track to warblers like "Timothy" and "Good Holiday To Get Luck" and "If You Dose." And for devotees of great AC/DC punk songs, there's the relentlessly boisterous "Let's Make It" plus two of the band's finest "rock all night" party anthems, "Shut Off Love" and "Are You Ready?"

*The Razor Edge* brought AC/DC roaring into the Nineties. And for the rest of the decade, they would become full-fledged members of the "Great Rock Revival," with success in many genres acknowledging the enduring power of the band's songcraft.

— Alan D. Perna



1995



