

This album is the hard loud companion to a movie about a Marvel Comics hero who takes care of business with heavy fists, steel will and righteous fury. But these fifteen songs were created and detonated by real iron men, with superhuman-boogie powers, no-surrender backbone and infinite rock & roll attitude.

Formed in Sydney, Australia in 1973 and led through thick, thin and tragic loss by the guitarists and Glasgow-born brothers, Angus and Malcolm Young, AC/DC are one of the biggest and best-loved bands in the world. This record is a roaring lesson in how they got there: by eliminating, with extreme prejudice, all unnecessary evils from their steam-train blues (gloss, restraint, cheap sentiment) and packing every riff, chorus and straight-awh backbeat with the fundamental charge and healing delirium of classic Fifties rock and Sixties electric R&B. Bob Scott, the group's singer in the mid- and late Seventies and a demon star in his tattoos and tight denim, put it this way to me 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." He sounded like he was only half-kidding.

Scott died in February, 1980, just after AC/DC cracked the U.S. Top Twenty for the first time with 1979's *Highway To Hell*. He was only 33. But that fighting spirit survived him in the Youngs' immediate decision to keep the band going, the hearty growl of Scott's successor Brian Johnson, and the resurrection kick and worldwide success of AC/DC's next album, *Back In Black*. "It's the AC/DC thing," Malcolm told me a couple of years ago with a grin, in that distinctive Scots-Aussie cackle he shares with his younger brother. "We can't go all and do something arty. We have to get the best out of what we can do. Either it's there – or it's not there."

AC/DC also have, in Angus, their own cartoon spitfire, a lethal guitar hero who, on stage every night, spits crisp rusted licks and bent-note snarls grounded in the Chicago grind and Mississippi mud of Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters and the British Invasion dynamics of the early Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds. But Angus does it all as he duckwalks madly through every song, bobs his head like a chicken in a trance and spins on his back, legs pumping the air, while dressed in an Aussie-schoolboy's suit – shorts, cap, tie and jacket, just like those he wore to class in the early Sixties.

It's not always that way. I caught Angus at an AC/DC tour rehearsal in 2008, playing the *Black Ice* bombshell "War Machine" with the same concise fire – locking in with Malcolm's rock-ribbed rhythm guitar, Johnson's bag-o'-grovel-crow and the longtime engine room of drummer Phil Rudd and bassist Cliff Williams –

while sitting on a chair, bent over his Gibson SG and smoking like a chimney. "I have to have the substance first, to feel it in me, before I can do a show," Angus said later that day. "That was always the thing for me – I want to play guitar."

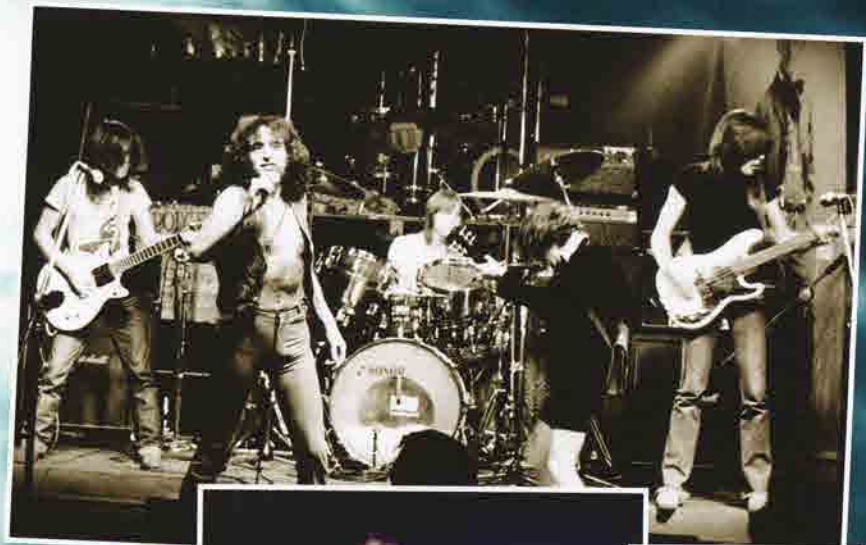
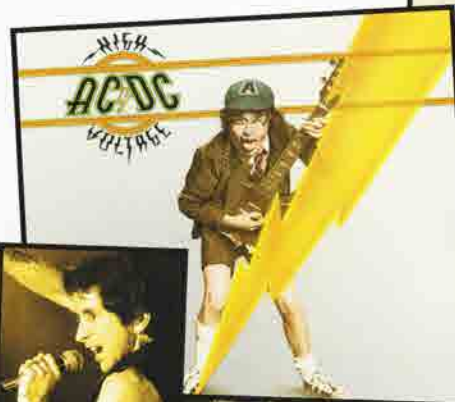
But twenty minutes before a gig, he dons the suit and walks out like he's on his way to a coning from the headmaster. Except Angus does the whipping: "The suit," he confessed, with one of those cackles, "pulls me in."

If you know the canon, you've figured it out. This record is not a greatest-hits hour, although there are fan-favorite blasts and stage-show pillars here, including the Scott-era grenade "T.N.T." ("Watch me explode!") and the 1977 power-chord creation story "Let There Be Rock." "Highway To Hell" was born in a Miami studio, at the rocky early writing sessions for that album. Angus started playing the immortal stuttering riff; Malcolm jumped over to the drums to add the relentless chugging beat. Malcolm, in turn, came up with the central choppy hook in "Back In Black" – partly inspired by one of the Youngs' favorite singles, 1960's "Shakin' All Over" by Johnny Kidd and the Pirates – during the Highway To Hell tour. As Angus tells it, "Malcolm had it on a cassette machine, and he was going to dump it. He thought it sounded too heavy. I said, 'No, no, don't wipe it! It's a good riff!' It really came to life once we got Brian, because of the range he had."

The rest of these songs are deeper noise, like "If You Want Blood (You've Got It)" – a little so good AC/DC used it first for a live album – and the heavy creeper "Cold Hearted Man," which snuck out on European pressings of 1978's *Powerage*. "Have A Drink On Me," a boisterous highlight of *Back In Black*, was one of the last songs Scott played with the Youngs – the night before his death, according to Malcolm. The brothers were hammering guitar parts into shape at a London studio when Scott popped by to hear what they were up to. A drummer in one of his early Aussie bands, the Valentines, Scott went right for the kit in the room and jammed along. He eventually left to go drinking with friends; the Youngs never saw him again.

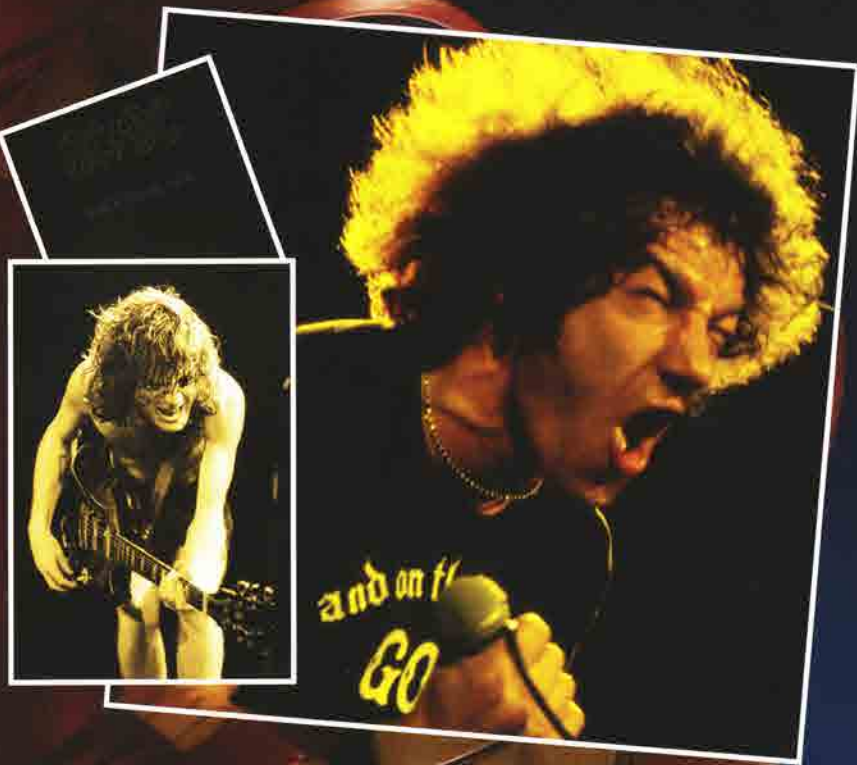
I vividly remember AC/DC pulling the trigger live on "Shoot To Thrill," also from *Back In Black*, at New York's Madison Square Garden in 1981, especially the way Angus doubled Johnson's high shrieks with long raw squeals of guitar. And while the track was a worldwide smash a decade ago, the crushing ingenuity of "Thunderstruck," iced with Angus' singing-wire staccato lick, sounds new and extraordinary every time.

T.N.T.



HELL AIN'T A BAD PLACE TO BE

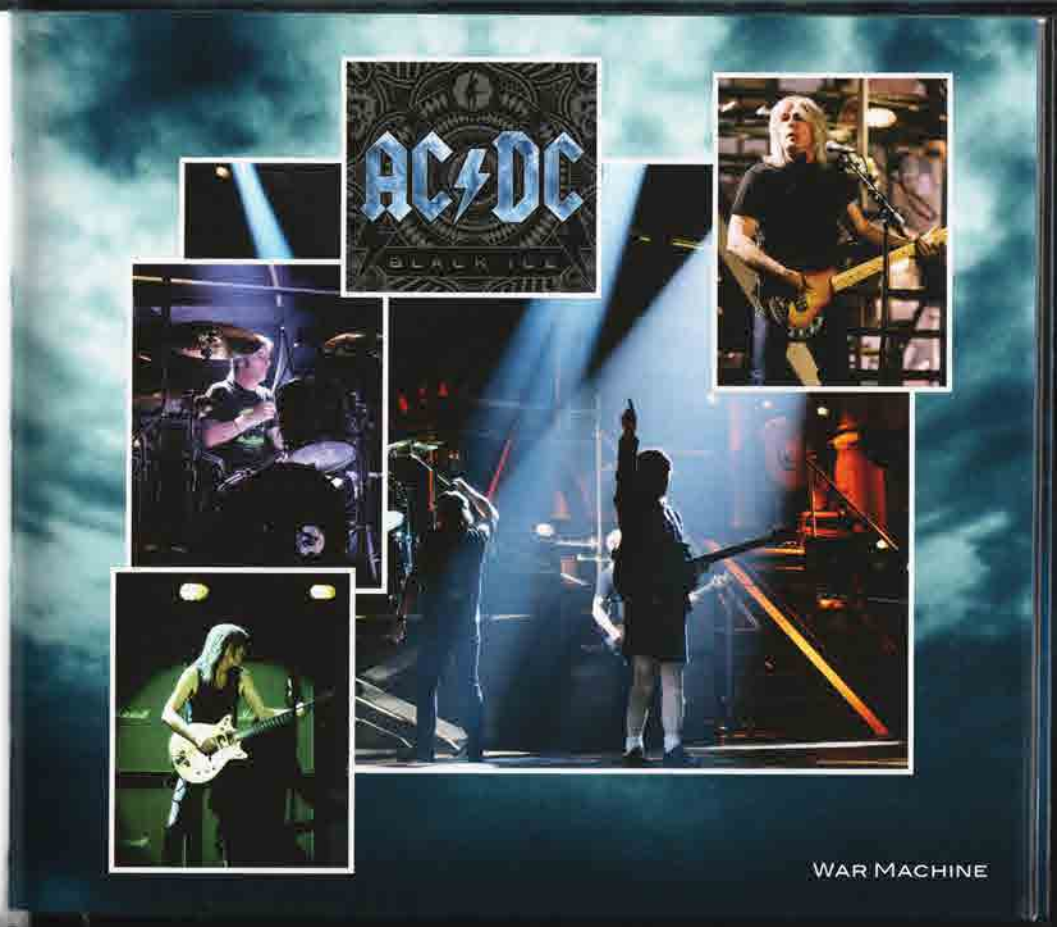
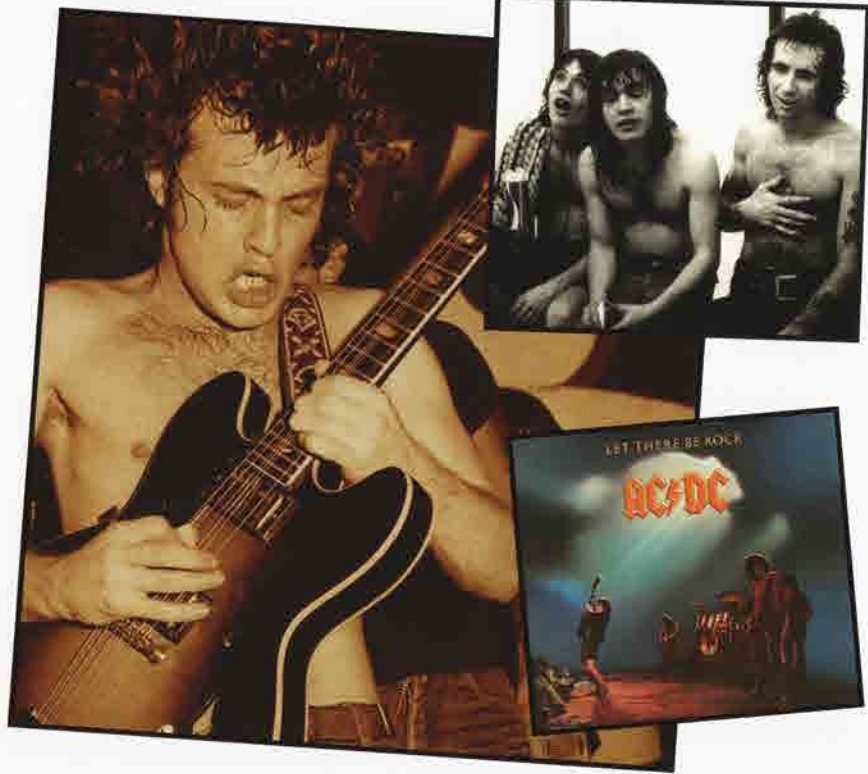
HAVE A DRINK ON ME



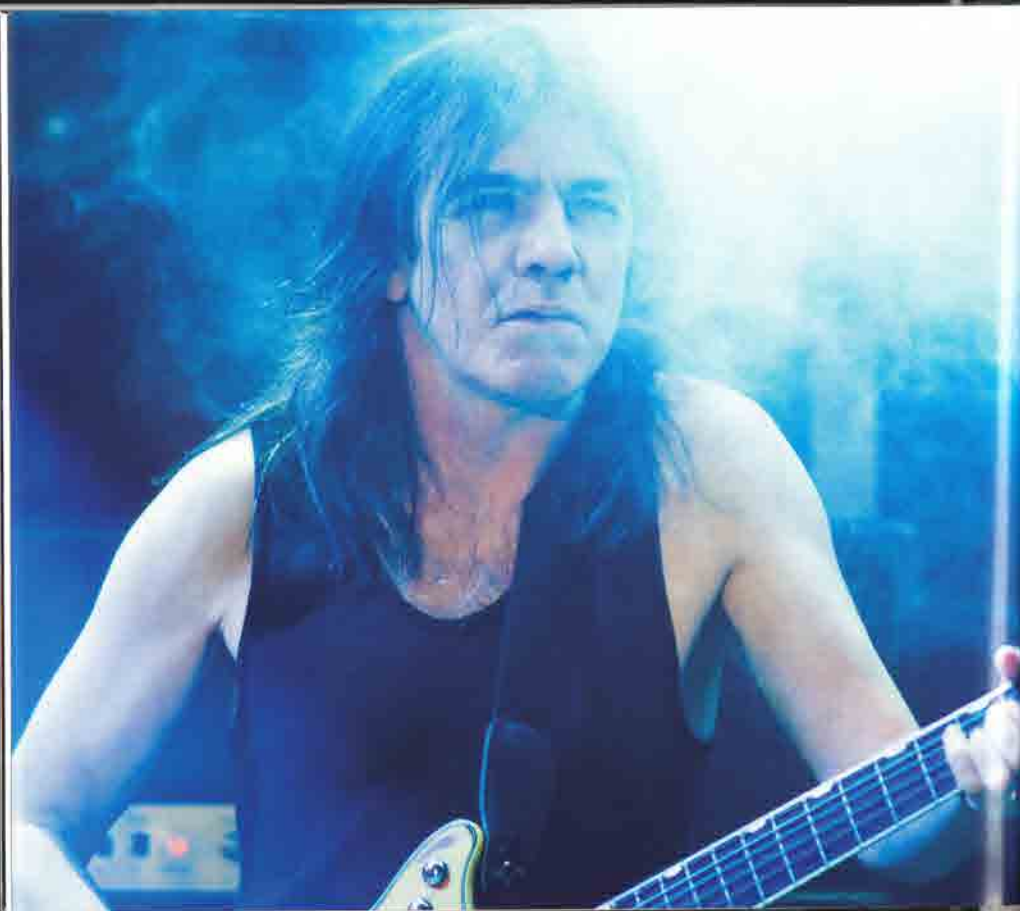
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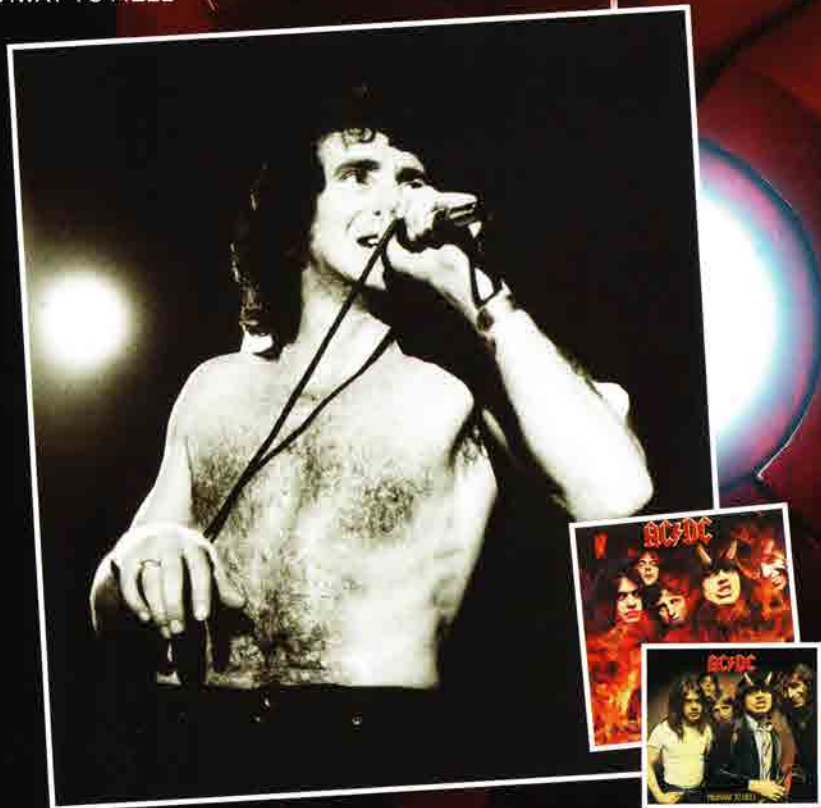
LET THERE BE ROCK



WAR MACHINE



HIGHWAY TO HELL



AC/DC

ANGUS YOUNG: LEAD GUITAR
MALCOLM YOUNG: RHYTHM GUITAR
BRIAN JOHNSON: VOCALS
CLIFF WILLIAMS: BASS
PHIL RUDD: DRUMS

BON SCOTT: VOCALS
(TRACKS 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 15)

MARK EVANS: BASS (TRACKS 4, 9, 10, 13)
CHRIS SLADE: DRUMS (TRACKS 6, 12)

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DVD

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SONY MUSIC

The roots are obvious too, everywhere. Angus and Malcolm already had this music in their blood. An older brother, Alexander, played in bands alongside the Beatles in teen clubs and sailors' bars in Hamburg, Germany in the early Sixties; another brother, George, was in Australia's own Sixties sensations, the Easybeats, and co-produced AC/DC's first records. Angus can still recite George's most frequent advice: "He would go, 'Do it like Chuck, just like Chuck Berry' – meaning nothing super-clever."

Malcolm's favorite guitarists included the Who's Pete Townshend and Free's Paul Kossoff. "That hard-edged rhythm style – that's what he thought made great rock & roll," Angus says of his brother, while the crackling sinew and ferocious lash in Angus' playing was influenced by the Yardbirds-era Jeff Beck, Mountain's Leslie West and the Texas blues tornado Johnny Winter, among others. And the brothers talk like dazzled kids, even now, about the night in 1966 when they saw the Rolling Stones, live in Sydney. "There was no 'Hello, how are you?' – they just came on and started playing," Angus recalls. "It was that attitude."

"They looked pissed off a bit," Malcolm adds, "except for Brian Jones. He was doing all that" – Malcolm plays air guitar and mimes a glide across a stage, shaking his shoulders. "Your eyes followed him," Angus says, nodding in approval.

It was, for both of them, a pivotal lesson. And while you don't see that kind of challenge and motion here, you know it. "If he does a twirl or kicks his legs," George says of Angus, "you almost hear it in the notes and phrases he plays." You hear the pride and battle too – the sound of a band that wanted to play only what was great and right about rock and nailed it, over and over. Your options: Get outta your seat – or outta the way. Actually, I loved how Scott put it, with that wolfish glee, back in '78, in "Rock 'N' Roll Domination": "Take a chance while you still got the choice."

You know what to do.

David Fricke

Rolling Stone

January 2010



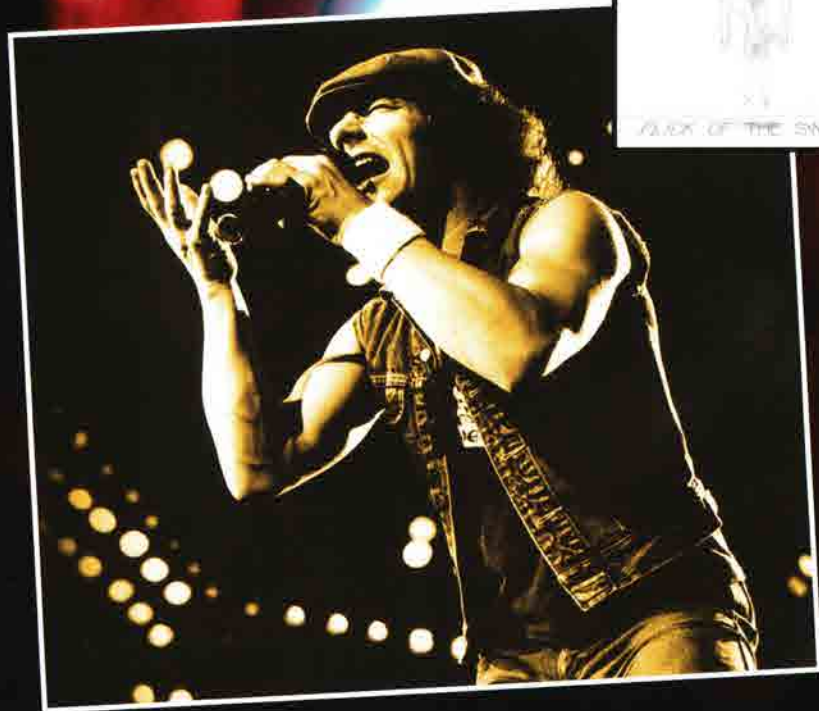


SHOOT TO THRILL



ROCK 'N' ROLL DAMNATION

GUNS FOR HIRE



COLD HEARTED MAN

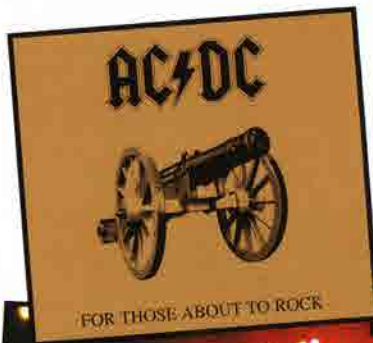
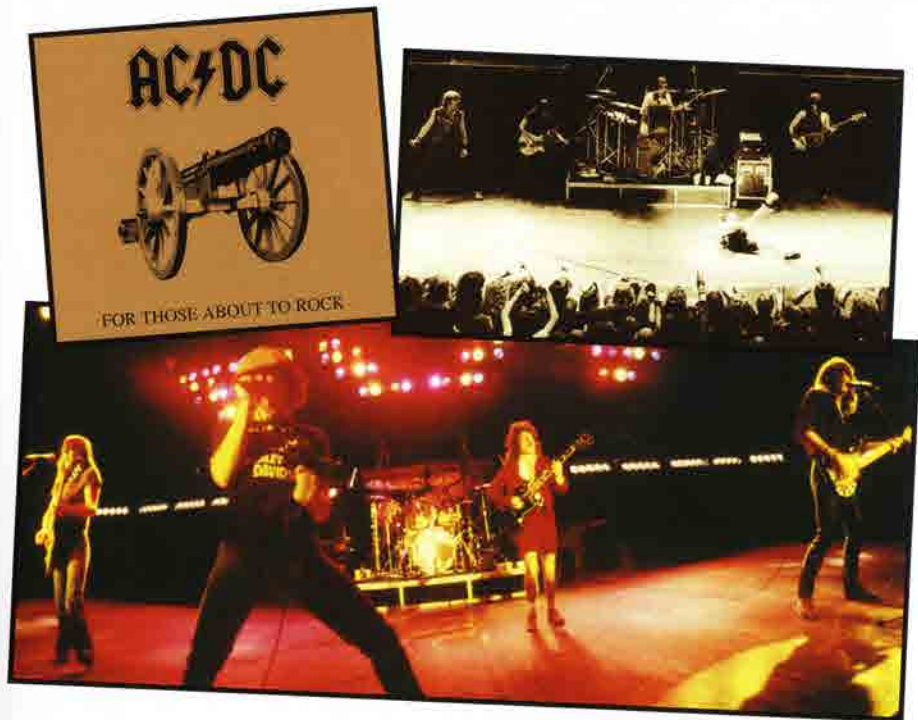
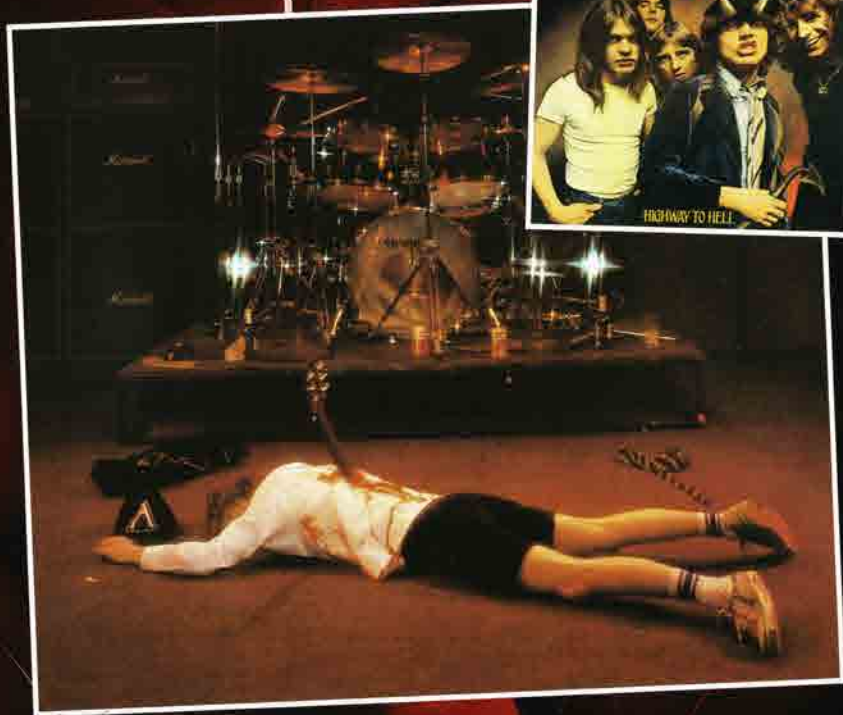


BACK IN BLACK



THUNDERSTRUCK

IF YOU WANT BLOOD (YOU'VE GOT IT)



EVIL WALKS

