It was a wake - a celebration of Bon's life...

BACK IN BLACK

25 YEARS ON: THE MAKING OF A MASTERPIECE
FOR WHOM THE BELLS TOLL

On the 25th anniversary of its release, Classic Rock celebrates the enduring appeal of AC/DC’s Back In Black – the all-time classic album from Angus Young and the band that very nearly didn’t get made, but which went on to sell 42 million copies around the globe.

WORDS: GEOFF BARTON AND JENS JAM RASMUSSEN
PHOTOS: ROBERT ELLIS/REPFOTO

IT WAS EARLY 1980. It looked like curtains for AC/DC. Of all the cruel tricks fate could have played on the band, this was as bad as it could get. There they were, back in Britain, basking in their hard-earned US success – their first million-selling album, Highway To Hell. Bon Scott was getting drunk and getting laid; Angus Young was getting married. All was right with the world.

AC/DC were just starting work on a new record when – or so the popular version of events goes – there was a phone call from their manager. He was at Kings College Hospital, London, identifying the body of a 33-year-old man who’d been found in a car in a puddle of vomit. The manager confirmed that it was the band’s frontman, Bon Scott, who had drunk himself to death.

AC/DC were stunned – blank-faced, broken shadows of the band that just three months ago had been opening for, and upstaging, Cheap Trick and Ted Nugent in the States. Now, in a cold and grim South London winter, Angus and Malcolm Young looked battle-shocked.

“We were so depressed,” Malcolm said. “We were just walking around in silence. Because there was nothing. Nothing.”
“BON USED TO SAY THAT BRIAN WAS A GREAT ROCK’N’ROLL SINGER IN THE LITTLE RICHARD MOULD.”

— ANGUS YOUNG
rewind to a short time earlier. It was a couple of weeks into February 1980 when AC/DC's core songwriting team - that's brothers Angus and Malcolm Young, of course - met up in a rehearsal studio in London called E-Zee Hire.

As soon as the Youngs arrived they plugged in their guitars to work on some tracks for the follow-up to Highway To Hell. The duo had plenty of ideas already. The songwriting process for their new album had begun the previous year - in hotel rooms, during snatched moments backstage and on the tour bus - while the band had been out on the road.

Angus and Malcolm were struggling away energetically when their singer, Bon Scott, walked into the studio.

"Need a drummer, fellas?" quipped Scott, alluding to his pre-AC/DC career when he doubled up on drums and vocals in small-time Australian bands. "I like to keep my hand in, y'know."

"Alright, man," chorused the Youngs. "There's a drum kit right over there.

A loose, light-hearted session commenced. After some general mucking about Angus and Malcolm began to pummel out a riff that sounded mighty distinctive. Bon allied himself to the beat. Swiftly and surely, a song that would eventually be titled 'Have A Drink On Me' took shape. Later Bon helped formulate the drum intro to a second song - one of Malcolm's that would gain the moniker 'Let Me Put My Love Into You'. At the end of the rehearsals Bon knocked his sticks and suggested another meeting next week.

"That'll give me time to write some lyrics. Then we can have another go at the songs."

"See you then," the brothers replied, quietly satisfied with the way the new tunes were developing at this early demo phase - and even with someone other than Phil Rudd on drums.

Bon Scott said his goodbyes and left the studio. He never returned.

A few days later, on Wednesday, February 20, the terrible news reached Angus, Malcolm and the other folk in the AC/DC camp. Their frontman was dead.

The band were stunned and the global rock'n'roll community was shocked to its foundations. But the mourning was not only for the man who had been christened Ronald Belford Scott. It was also for AC/DC. Surely, people speculated, they could never recover from the blow of losing such a key member - a man whose roughhouse image, raucous vocals and jewlryicism were such key elements of their success.

The previous year, 1979, had been a remarkable one in AC/DC's history. Major changes in the band's camp had been followed by the huge artistic and commercial success of Highway To Hell. Released in the summer, it hit No.8 in the UK and became their first chart album in the US, where it peaked at No.17. The title track was also a Top 5 single in the States.

Those 'major changes' had occurred at the beginning of the year when AC/DC announced plans to make their first album without their longtime producers, former Easybeats men Harry Vanda and George Young (the latter being the elder brother of Angus and Malcolm).

Around the same time AC/DC also acquired a powerful new manager - Peter Mensch, an aggressive, no-nonsense American - as the successor to Michael Browning. Previously employed by the Leber-Krebs organisation in New York, Mensch had helped develop the careers of monster US rock acts such as Aerosmith and Ted Nugent earlier in the 70s. In later years Mensch would go on to help create the mighty Q-Prime company with his partner Cliff Burnstein. Q-Prime's biggest client: Metallica.

(When Classic Rock approached Peter Mensch to contribute to this story he responded via a typically terse email, claiming, somewhat bizarrely, 'to have forgotten most of it."

At the beginning of spring '79 AC/DC spent a three-week-long but sadly unproductive period working on new material with producer Eddie Kramer (Jimi Hendrix, Kiss) in Miami.

According to Malcolm Young, "Kramer was a bit of a prat, to be honest with you. He looked at Bon and said to us: 'Can your guy sing?' He might've sat behind the knobs for Hendrix, but he's certainly not Hendrix, I can tell you that much."

Frustrated by the lack of progress AC/DC left Florida and relocated back to the UK. Having failed to connect with the vastly experienced Kramer, they decided to give an up-and-coming producer a try: a guy called Robert John 'Mutt' Lange.

Born in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) Lange had only a few studio credits under his belt, including The Boomtown Rats, City Boy, The Motors and Graham Parker. But working with AC/DC would prove to be the turning point in his career. He would later make sweet music with Def Leppard, Foreigner, The Cars, Bryan Adams, Heart and many more, including Shania Twain (the latter in the marital home as well as the studio).

Ex-manager Browning, who gave up running a club in Melbourne, Australia, to guide AC/DC's early career, had originally recommended Lange to the band. (Browning, it was thought, had taken AC/DC as far as he could.) The consensus was that they needed someone with more muscle-power to fully capitalise on their success in the US market.

Whatever, when AC/DC and Lange met to lay down some early Highway To Hell tracks at the Roundhouse Studios in North London it soon became clear the producer wanted to add a little polish to AC/DC's typical rock'n'roll dynamics. As it turned out, that was no real cause for concern. AC/DC still sounded in-your-face but their choruses were more melodic and structured. Lange did an admirable job in refining and sharpening the band's songs without losing the raw edge that was the source of their original appeal.

But the recording process took a while. AC/DC were used to polishing off an album in three weeks. Under Lange's tutelage that period extended to three months.

Angus Young summed up Lange's contribution succinctly at the time: "He's very much the sound guy. With AC/DC that was his big thing. He was always trying to get tuned in on the sound quality. We were always ones for the groove quality and the song quality."

On the road in the UK and Europe to promote Highway To Hell, AC/DC toured with up-and-coming New Wave Of British Heavy Metal bands such as Def Leppard and Diamond Head, as well as the more established Judas Priest. In the US they were the tough act Cheap Trick and Ted Nugent had to follow. Returning to Britain, AC/DC were special guests to their own favourite band. The Who, at a one-off show at Wembley Stadium on August 18.

AC/DC ended their Highway To Hell tour with six shows at London's old Hammersmith Odeon (now the Apollo) during Christmas '79 - apart from a couple of rescheduled gigs in Newcastle and Southampton the following January.

AC/DC were poised for megastardom as the 1980s began. Besides the tracks they had worked on in the E-Zee Hire studio, Malcolm Young had already pretty much gotten a whole new song together. Starting with an incredible pounding riff, it would become the title track for the band's first album of the new decade: Back In Black.

But then the unthinkable had happened: Bon Scott died.

In the days and weeks after February 20 ... While the British rock press published their tributes and obituaries about AC/DC's frontman - the remaining band members were preparing themselves disconsolately for a funeral service to be held where Bon Scott grew up: the
On the road in the US in 1980, Laura Canyon encountered a distinctly different, Bon Scott-less AC/DC.

In the immediate aftermath of Bon Scott's death, once in a while the brothers Angus and Malcolm Young would get together and, without saying a word, noodle a few things on their guitars, then put their instruments back in their cases without a word.

Now and again their manager might pop in with a pep talk or a list of singers they might audition. But like Angus said: "None of it made any sense." Particularly that Bon - who'd survived so many days, from being chased by guns by irate husbands, to single-handedly taking on armed hecklers at the wilder Australian bars they played in their early days - could be killed by something so innocuous and ordinary as having a few too many drinks with a mate at the Moe Machine in London's Camden Town while watching a bunch of bands.

"Bon," said Angus, "is irreplaceable.
And that was the last I heard - until the summer of 1980, when I was back in the States, as were AC/DC, on their triumphant Back In Black world tour.

To the sound of an ominously, slowly tolling bell, the band took the stage. And in the place where we used to see a wiry ball of tattoos and testosterone with a shark's tooth in his ear, was a beer-bellied Goodsir with a wide grin - and a flat cap on his head. Brian Johnson's powerful, glass-gargling vocals sounded magnificent.

And these Asians I'd seen in London six months back looked like someone had filled them with jet-proxeller fuel and lit a match.

Meeting Brian backstage for the first time was an experience. It was one of those anonymous Midwestern sports arenas, all concrete and fluorescent lights. There was a bowl of M&Ms on the table, a waste bin full of ice and Budweiser, and a bunch of girls batting their eyelashes at Brian.

Had it been Bon, they would not have been upright, but Brian's just sitting there like the cat that's got the cream, chortling to himself and sampling another beer. Angus comes in with a cup of tea.

"I'll have one of them," says Brian.

One of the groupies, I ask?
He laughs fit to choke. "You're hoakin' jokin', less. I'm married with two kids. That's for the crew.

If there's one thing every rock star on the US arena circuit that year, I never met him. And the warmth between Brian and the band is palpable. Bon's dad, Malcolm Young, had visited them at the funeral that Bon would've wanted the band to go on. As chance would have it, the singer of one of Bon's favourite groups, Goodsir, was unemployed. "They phoned us up and said, would I like to come and give it a go," says Brian.

And he did," says Malcolm, "and put a smile on our faces - for the first time since Bon.

> harbour town of Fremantle just south of the West Australian city of Perth. The date was to be March 1. Speaking to Classic Rock exclusively, 25 years after the funeral, Angus Young clearly recalls meeting up with Bon's parents in Fremantle - and what that fateful encounter meant to the future of the band.

"We flew back to Australia and spent some time with Bon's mum [Jsa] and dad [Charles, also known as Chick]. I remember Bon's dad saying to Malcolm and me: 'You must continue with AC/DC. You're young guys, you're on the brink of major success and you can't afford to give up now.' But I'll be honest with you - we weren't really listening; we were so wrapped up in our grief. Bon's dad kept repeating his assurances. He told us time and again: 'You should keep going, you've still got a lot to give.'

Despite the encouragement, Angus and Malcolm weren't in the mood for creating any kind of new music. Yet.

"We were heartbroken," says Angus bluntly.

"Okay, we knew the world had lost a big talent and, of course, our fans were devastated. But... we had lost much more. We had lost a friend - a very close friend. A person you bond with in life. Honestly, we didn't know what to do with ourselves at the time."

Contrary to popular belief, AC/DC didn't immediately - and, as some have claimed, obscenely - get down to the business of auditioning for replacement singers in the days after Bon's demise.

As Malcolm Young told us: "Peter Mensch approached us on the plane the flight back to the UK [after Bon Scott's funeral], saying he had a list of singers' names for us to look at. I just couldn't be bothered. I remember waving them away and just thinking it's not fucking right, you know?"

But as the days in March slowly passed Angus and Malcolm pulled themselves together for another effort on what still remained a very uncertain album project.

Angus: "When we got back to London after the funeral we didn't really get together much. But after a couple of weeks or so, Malcolm called me up and said: 'Instead of the two of us just sitting around and moping, doing nothing, why don't we do some work? At least that'll keep us together.'"

So the brothers closed themselves away in
“PEOPLE LIKE BON ARE UNIQUE. THEY’RE SPECIAL. WE DIDN’T WANT SOMEONE TO COME IN AND COPY HIM.”

- ANGUS YOUNG

their rehearsal studio and adopted a siege mentality. 

Angus: “We shut the doors and we didn’t think of record companies, managers, or anything like that. We just hid ourselves away and worked on our songs.”

“A veil of secrecy descended. There were a lot of rumours going around at the time,” he continues. “People wanted to know what we were up to and what our plans were. A lot of journalists were calling up our record company and asking for interviews. But it was much too early. We shied away from all that. We didn’t want any pressures from outside.”

“I guess we retreated into our music. At the time we weren’t really capable of dealing with very much. We’d lost someone very close to us and we weren’t thinking very clearly. But we decided working was better than sitting there, still in shock about Bon. So in some ways it was therapeutic, you know.”

The album that was to become Back in Black began to come together. But the future of AC/DC was still very much up in the air.

Angus: “We didn’t really know if the material we had was decent enough. We didn’t have much of a perspective on things. So, what kept us going? Well, Malcolm and me had started the band together and, subconsciously, I suppose, we didn’t want it to end. We didn’t want to leave things unfinished. We’d worked on a few songs with Bon just before his death, after all. And his dad wanted us to carry on. Somehow we couldn’t bear to turn around and say: ‘That’s it, we’re not doing it any more.’”

“Soon enough, the obvious issue of a new AC/DC singer came into the frame.

Angus: “Even though we had locked ourselves away people were still taking an interest in us. It wasn’t only journalists. Peter Mensch was in close contact and he was always asking: ‘What are you doing? What are you up to? Look, guys, have I still got a band to manage?’”

“After a while, when we felt we were close to having all the songs together, we knew we had to confront the question of a new singer. But it wasn’t like we put an advertisement in a music paper that said: ‘AC/DC want a new frontman.’ No… that would have been too over the top. It was subtler than that. People like Bon are unique. They’re special. And we didn’t want someone to come in and copy him. If anything, we wanted someone who was their own character.”

Numerous and varied frontmen were rumoured to queuing up to stake their claim as Bon Scott’s replacement.

Among them were Stevie Wright from The Easybeats (the 60s band mentioned earlier); Allen Fryer from Oz band Fat Lip (later to be renamed Heaven); Londoner Gary Holton from the 70s group The Heavy Metal Kids; Englishman Steve Burton, the gravel-voiced singer who fronted Angus and Malcolm’s cousin Stevie Young’s act The Starfighters; Jimmy Barnes; and an older guy named Benny Wilson-Slessor who had found fame in Back Street Crawler, the band formed by ex-Beatle guitarist Paul Kossoff.

Another singer, Marc Storace of Swiss band Krokus, even claimed to have been offered the AC/DC position. He said: “I wasn’t even tempted because I believed Krokus were going to continue to get bigger. But back then I was naive. I was cocky and naive.”

A set-shot from the band’s first tour with Brian Johnson.

BACK IN BLACK TRACK-BY-TRACK

Hell’s Bells
That oh-so-familiar deep, resonating, tolling bell—it’s one of the greatest openings to an album, ever. Mark and eree, Brian Johnson asserts his authority straightaway with his howling, growling vocals.

Shoot to Thrill
A perfect riposte to the prime-picked, gloom-ridden Hell’s Bells. Catchy guitar work and full lyrics in the finest AC/DC tradition.

What Do You Do for the Money, Honey
If you’re looking for tender love songs, you’ve bought the wrong disc. As savage musically as it is lyrically, this one is a rant against rich and players of prostitutes: “You’re loving on the take. And you’re always on the make.”

Let Me Put My Love into You
More bone-crashing rampage.

Back in Black
Angus’s brilliant stinging riff and Jon’s imprompto, imploring vocals make the title song a high-voltage AC/DC classic.

You Shook Me All Night Long
The album’s first single. A compulsion stomp that was a top 40 hit on both sides of the Atlantic.

Have a Drink on Me
At the time, AC/DC were criticized for including a track with a little such as this, given the manner of Bon Scott’s death. 25 years on, those objections have dimmed and it sounds like a simple—yet undeniably raucous—celebration of Bon’s party-hard lifestyle.

She’s a Rocker
Includes the lyric “Dirty women on machines.” A worrying combination. A song that’s popular with Jake the Peg; less so with Long John Silver. And as for Douglas Bader...

Rock & Roll Ain’t Noise Pollution
Inspired a generation of boy racers in dropped-top Fiestas to chase old age pensioners off pavements with their cars’ million-Watt sub-woofers belting out the latest UK garage malarky.

HELLO CHUCK! GOT SOME NEWS FOR YOU! HEY, MAN IT’S LIKE THIS HERMAN Rector ROCKER Rector Rector Rector Rector! WE’RE ON THE ATTACK! COME ON! LET’S TIE SIEK! Rector ROCKER Rector Rector ROCKER Rector Rector! SHARIN’ A GEAR, LET ME SEE YOU ROCK!
Speaking today, Angus Young is still cagey about the audition process.

"All I can say is that lot of people were being suggested. Old friends were calling us up and saying: ‘Hey, I know someone who could do the job.’ And people who you’re familiar with, who you know quite well... you do invite them along and give them a listen, don’t you?’

Allen Fryer actually left his band Fat Lip to stake his claim as Bon Scott’s successor.

Fryer said: ‘I had spoken with Albert Productions [the Australian record label and worldwide publishers of AC/DC] and they were interested. I just dropped everything and tried out for AC/DC. They took Bon’s voice out of the tapes on songs like Whole Lotta Rosie, Shot Down In Flames, Sin City, all that stuff. They shoved my voice in on them.

‘I went back to Adelaide and found out from George [Young] and Harry [Vanda] that I had gotten the gig. Then it came on a TV show that local boy Allen Fryer is the new singer for AC/DC. I said: ‘What the hell? Nobody was supposed to know anything like this. So George and Harry wanted me in the band, but meanwhile the boys [AC/DC] were in London at the time and they were trying out some other guys...’

One of those ‘other guys’ was an unlikely figure: a stocky fella in a cloth cap, named Brian Johnson. Hailing from County Durham in the north-east of England, Johnson was in the process of trying to relaunch his 70s band Geordie, one-hit wonders in the UK whose single, All Because of You reached No.6 in the chart in early ’73.

25 years down the line, it’s now clear that Bon Scott had a posthumous effect in picking his successor.

Angus: ‘We certainly knew Bon was a fan of Brian Johnson’s. Bon had seen Brian in England [in 1973] and had been very impressed by him. Bon was touring with a band he was in before AC/DC called Fraternity, and they opened up for Geordie.

‘Bon was a big Little Richard fan – he believed that anyone singing rock ‘n’ roll would have to match Little Richard. I remember Bon saying that Brian was a great rock’n’roll singer in the Little Richard mould. Bon used to buy a lot of classic rock’n’roll records and he would bring them in for me to listen to, because I was the youngest [of the AC/DC members]. Bon used to say to me: ‘Have you heard this record yet, Angus? This is one of my favourites.’ That was an important part of my musical education.

Recalling those fond memories, Angus and the boys agreed to try out Brian Johnson as AC/DC’s new singer, ‘Jonno’, as he would become known, got the call to come down to London and rehearse with the band on Grand National day: March 29, 1980. But at first AC/DC couldn’t find him. Then they discovered he was downstairs playing pool with their roadies. The band couldn’t help but laugh. Brian sounded just like the kind of down-to-earth guy they needed.

Johnson sang Whole Lotta Rosie at his audition; it was a brave move to tackle a track so intimately associated with Bon Scott. Another audition song was rumoured to be Ike & Tina Turnere’s classic Nutbush City Limits, but Angus Young can’t confirm that one.

“We could have [done it] at the time,” he says. “I think Malcolm asked him [Brian]: ‘Tell us which songs you feel comfortable with.’ And Brian said he knew Whole Lotta Rosie, so we played that. Brian also wanted to try Highway To Hell. Malcolm said: ‘What else do you want to try?’ And I think we played a rock’n’roll song, maybe a Little Richard one or something.”

How much time elapsed from the audition until Brian Johnson joined AC/DC officially?

Angus: “Well, there were some other people we had to see, so I suppose it was a few weeks, you know.”

But Angus’s brother Malcolm apparently made up his mind on the spot: “Brian sang great. It [Johnson’s audition] put a little smile on our face – for the first time since Bon.”

As Johnson told Classic Rock after being offered the job: “I remember thinking to myself: ‘Oh Brian, what have you got yourself into?’ I wasn’t scared though, I was excited. I looked at it like, well, if I do get fired I can tell me mates I was in AC/DC for a couple of weeks, and I’d had a nice holiday in London.”

Realistically, no one expected Brian’s ‘holiday’ to last 25 years – and counting.

The recording of Back In Black was set to
“BON DIDN’T DWELL ON THE MEANING OF LIFE TOO MUCH. HE LIVED FOR THE MOMENT.”

— ANGUS YOUNG
BONG! THE STORY OF AC/DC'S HELL'S BELL

Malcolm Young even had a ring-a-ling replica cast, Dave Ling discovers.

As the lights dim and curtains open, one of the most famous and iconic stage props of all time gradually descends from the ceiling. Above the audience's din comes the tolling of a huge bronze bell, clutched by a man wearing a flat cap.

Slowly and precisely, the musicians lurch into the concert's opening song. "I got my big, I'm gonna take you to Hell," squeals the singer animatedly. "I'm gonna get ya! Satan get ya!"

As rock theatre goes, what we're witnessing is pure, unforgettable genius. Indeed, the very way AC/DC could follow it with their next album was an AC/DC cannon salute.

Weighing just over a ton, the bands now legendary bell was manufactured in the UK for 1980's world tour to promote Back In Black, their debut with new singer Brian Johnson. The idea of using it to preface the album and their shows came while working with producer Mutt Lange.

"A phone call came from a recording studio [ Compass Point ] in the Bahamas," recalls Steve Cake, whose father worked at John Taylor Bellfounders at the time and is now employed by the same Loughborough-based company. "I was only a kid of course, but the situation made me come in and nose around."

The legend's first choice of a bell that pealed the roar of the AC/DC band was in the Bahamas, the Manoor Mobile was sent to the midlands to record the album's intro. While AC/DC worked in Nassau, the Manoor Mobile was sent to the midlands to record the album's intro.

According to fans of AC/DC minutiae, with the group's own bell still being tuned, a similar one at Loughborough's War Memorial was captured for posterity instead.

"Truntr" insists Cake. "The traffic and birds chiming made that recording unusable. So the work [on the AC/DC bell] was speeded up, and what you hear on the album was definitely recorded at our factory."

So now you know Cake believes: that the original bell - manufactured for £6,000 in 1980; if it now cost twice as much - is still in AC/DC's possession, despite various rumours to the contrary.

"Someone saw it in a shop window in Sydney, but we think that some fibre-glass copies must have been made," he reveals. "When the hand play live, the bell swings out over the crowd. You couldn't possibly do that with something that weighs a ton."

It's hard to believe the group would ever sell their pride and joy, especially when one considers that guitarist Malcolm Young, later commissioned by AC/DC to mould him a smaller replica (pictured above).

"I believe he used it to replace a candelabra at his Hertfordshire house," deduces Steve. "Apparently there's a sweeping staircase that now has this bell right at the top."

When Classic Rock readers learn the above, it could initiate a whole new line in merchandising. Indeed, Steve states that anyone visiting www.taylorbells.co.uk will find themselves in luck.

"In the album's anniversary year we can make anything that people want," he confirms, "so long as their money's the right colour."

Hell's Bells & skateboarding was a popular pursuit in 1980.

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the trees. I was so happy that I'd done it. But I hadn't really heard one song. I'd go in and do a couple of verses, pop back and do a chorus. That's the way Mutt keeps you interested, you know."

Ultimately, Johnson's only complaint concerned the high notes on Shade A Leg: "Oh, that was fucking way up. Some of those notes will never be heard by man again."

Released in America on July 21, 1980, and in Britain and Europe 10 days later, Back In Black stormed to the No.1 position in the UK album chart. It reached No.4 in the US where it stayed in the chart for 131 weeks.

Last year - as befits an album that contains a track called Have A Drink On Me - Back In Black passed the 'Double Diamond' mark for sales in the States alone. That means more than 20 million copies sold - in other words, 20-times platinum - a record beaten by only five other records: The Eagles' Greatest Hits (28 million) Michael Jackson's Thriller (26 million), Pink Floyd's The Wall (23 million), Led Zeppelin IV (22 million) and Billy Joel's Greatest Hits (21 million).

In the US Back In Black is now in front of The Beatles' White Album, Shania Twain's Come On Over and Fleetwood Mac's Rumours (all on 19 million). On a worldwide basis the album has passed 42 million sales.

Even today Angus can't quite believe it. "Those are incredible figures. Mind-boggling. All we've ever done, throughout our career, is record stuff we hope our fans will like. Nothing has been premeditated. That's how we've always approached it. We've been that way since the beginning. When we first started playing live, it was always a case of: what do the people who're paying money to see us want to hear?"

Back In Black also pays tribute to Bon Scott. Angus: "Yeah, that was the whole idea. The cover was black and the album began with the sound of a tolling bell."

But it isn't all doom and gloom. The album is full of seductive party tunes like Shoot To Thrill and You Shook Me All Night Long. "Yes, because you have to remember that Bon enjoyed a good party. When people die people often hold a wake, something that's more of a celebration of a person's life. Bon didn't dwell on the meaning of life too much. He lived for the moment."

"Twenty-five years after its release Back In Black still stands the test of time remarkably well. And it continues to work on two levels.

To the occasional buyer of rock records - the weekend warrior, if you will; someone who is unconcerned about the fine details of AC/DC history - Back In Black retains a commanding power and presence.

To dyed-in-the-wool AC/DC fans Back In Black is also as vital as ever - and for them it serves as an important link between the Bon Scott era and the rebirth of the band. The album is a turbulent mix of emotions: there's a discernible anger about Bon's untimely death coupled with a teeth-gritting determination to carry on.

We asked Angus Young what makes him most proud about Back in Black today? He replied sombrely: "It's the fact that we were strong enough at the time to keep ourselves together and see our way through a major tragedy."

AC/DC played their first gig with Brian Johnson in Maur, Belgium. It was July 1 in the summer of 1980. Five months earlier, in a cold and grim South London winter, it had looked like curtains. And then suddenly the band were back. In black.

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