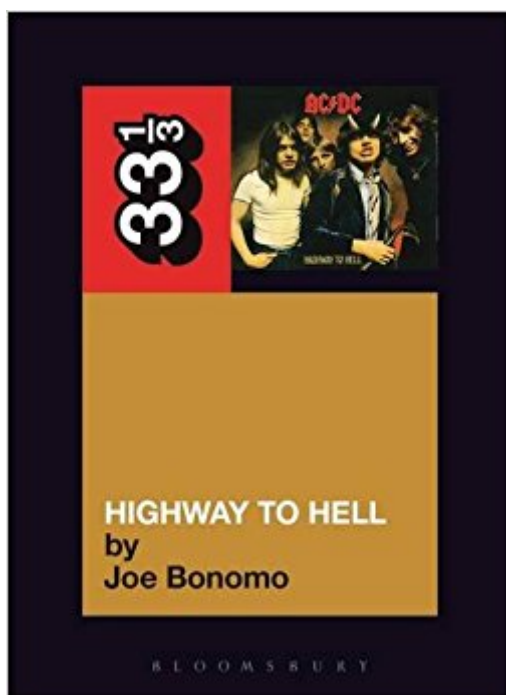


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AC DC's Highway To Hell (33 1/3)



Synopsis

Released in 1979, AC/DC's Highway To Hell was the infamous last album recorded with singer Bon Scott, who died of alcohol poisoning in London in February of 1980. Officially chalked up to "Death by Misadventure," Scott's demise has forever secured the album's reputation as a partying primer and a bible for lethal behavior, branding the album with the fun chaos of alcoholic excess and its flip side, early death. The best songs on Highway To Hell achieve Sonic Platonism, translating rock & roll's transcendent ideals in stomping, dual-guitar and eighth-note bass riffing, a Paleolithic drum bed, and insanely, recklessly odd but fun vocals. Joe Bonomo strikes a three-chord essay on the power of adolescence, the durability of rock & roll fandom, and the transformative properties of memory. Why does Highway To Hell matter to anyone beyond non-ironic teenagers? Blending interviews, analysis, and memoir with a fan's perspective, Highway To Hell dramatizes and celebrates a timeless album that one critic said makes "disaster sound like the best fun in the world."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Joe Bonomo teaches in the English Department of Northern Illinois University. He is the author of *Sweat: The Story of the Fleshtones, America's Garage Band* (Continuum 2007), and *Installations* (Penguin), a collection of prose poems. His personal essays and prose poems have appeared in numerous literary journals.

I expected WAY more from this little tome: I thought we would get a blow by blow of THE MAKING OF HIGHWAY TO HELL. Maybe 5% of the book discusses this. For the rest, we get descriptions of what the author thought of the songs during his teenage years. And which of his friends still like the album now. And a brief history of Bon Scott. I know there's precious little info out there on the making of this album. Writing a book like this is not easy. But when so little of the book covers the making of the album in the studio.... we get stuck with filler material that adds very little to the historical importance of this album. Do not buy this if you are a behind the scenes fan. Or even a MUTT fan.

I am one of those annoying Bon Scott people: I admit, when he died, so did my interest in AC/DC. His drunken Donald Duck vocals, and loopy, winkingly, silly-stupid-goofy lyrics were what made the band great. All due respect to the Young brothers (and Phil Rudd and Cliff Williams), no matter how catchy, driving and (yeah) rocking the music, Scott was the cement. Brian Johnson seems like a wonderful guy and I suppose he has his charms, but for me, his voice is just shrill and his lyrics just stupid-stupid. My personal favorite has always been "Let There Be Rock" (Dix), but Highway to Hell is probably the one most people would choose as the Bon Scott classic and defining moment. I won't argue with that. Nor will I argue with this book. Like most everything else I've read in this series, the book is personal, a little quirky and an attempt to bring the reader a sense of being the listener. To its credit, it does this better than many. The book is simply fun, catchy and has a driving beat - like the album it is about. It looks at the band, their career up to this (the album's) point, the circumstances of recording it and the pressures on it and the band to be the one that put them over the top. It did. Of course, Scott seems to have been BORN over the top, and the book's portrait of him does him proud and, despite this in no way attempting to be a biography, this is a pointed and thoughtful view of him and what he brought to the band. And it is just fun to read. It is thoughtful without being ponderous, well-researched without straining to show off its' authors bona fides or academic prowess. A very strong entry in the series and a fun book about the album as a standalone.

The writer is a HUGE Bon Scott fan. And he makes his argument for Bon very convincingly throughout the pages of the book. His personal testimony, as well as analysis of the album, and its relevance to the AC/DC discography, is to the point and free of pretension. My complaint is this: I too prefer Bon to Brian Johnson. I believe you could take everything from the Bon years and put

together an album of your choosing that would make up the best AC/DC album. As such, it still remains that "Back In Black" is their best album. Yes, as a whole they were better and much more entertaining with Bon, but if it wasn't for his death, they wouldn't have had the inspiration to create their best-selling and most realized album. There's a reason "Back In Black" is their best-selling album. While it is easily their most over-played album on the radio, he still blows the album off a little too easily. I can agree that after "Black" they were a little over-blown, but he still dismisses "Black" a little too easily. Still, a great book in a great series.

Love the books

Reading this as an interested outsider rather than a committed AC/DC fan, I wanted an answer to the question on the back cover blurb: "Why does HIGHWAY TO HELL matter to anyone beyond non-ironic teenagers?" I'm not sure that question can really be answered. A classic album of loud, headbanging songs about rough sex and the pursuit of more of the same doesn't stand up to deep analysis, and why should it? It's music for the body, not the mind, and it can be performed and recorded well or badly. The energy and sincerity of this music was caught live in the studio by an engineer and producer who knew enough to get out of the band's way and let them rock out, and that it turned out to be singer Bon Scott's drunken last will and testament is one of the ironies of pop art. Writer Joe Bonomo does an excellent job of analyzing these tracks, arguing for what works (or doesn't) for him, and goes on to muse on some telling photographs of the band in their up-and-coming years, and to ask for his high school friends' recollections of this music, and what it means to them now. He has little use for AC/DC's records with Brian Johnson as the frontman; Bon Scott's perpetual adolescence, however damaging, was both genuine and irreplaceable.

A tremendously fun and fast-reading addition to the venerable 33 1/3 series. Bonomo is clearly a fan of the band, which doesn't happen in this series as often as you would think; he clearly relishes the opportunity to put in his two cents on one of the great albums by one of history's longest-lasting and hardest rock bands. Chock-full of interesting analyses of band photos, background on the slow-but-steady rise of sales in the band's early career, and especially great anecdotes and info about the band's then-and-eternal lead singer, the late-and-still-missed Bon Scott. I will be seeing AC/DC at Dodger Stadium on the last U.S. show of their current tour, and this book made me as sad as anything has that Bon and Malcolm Young won't be joining us. (Note: My personal favorite song by the band is on this record; that would be "If You Want Blood (You Got It)", used to brilliant

effect in the criminally underrated 2007 action thriller "Shoot 'Em Up.")

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