

ACDC – Black Ice (2008)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 10 October 2009 10:01 - Last Updated Saturday, 23 September 2017 21:44

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01. *Rock N' Roll Train* - 4:21
02. *Skies On Fire* - 3:34
03. *Big Jack* - 3:57
04. *Anything Goes* - 3:22
05. *War Machine* - 3:09
06. *Smash N' Grab* - 4:06
07. *Spoilin' For a Fight* - 3:17
08. *Wheels* - 3:28
09. *Decibel* - 3:34
10. *Stormy May Day* - 3:10
11. *She Likes Rock N' Roll* - 3:53
12. *Money Made* - 4:15
13. *Rock N' Roll Dream* - 4:41
14. *Rocking All The Way* - 3:22
15. *Black Ice* - 3:25

Brian Johnson – lead vocals Angus Young – lead guitar, slide guitar on "Stormy May Day"
Malcolm Young – rhythm guitar, backing vocals Cliff Williams – bass guitar, backing vocals
Phil Rudd – drums, percussion

Unlike any other band of their stature, AC/DC truly don't care about the world at large. They see no triumph in their longevity, they long ago dismissed not only the idea of artistic statements but the very notion of artistic growth: they aren't good or bad, they simply are. They have nothing left to prove, so perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise that their albums lack any sense of urgency or motivation. AC/DC never rush to cut a record; they wait until Angus Young has collected enough riffs to hammer out an album's worth of songs, then they file in one by one to lay down their tracks with a big-budget producer, who inevitably gives them a clean, mammoth sound that's no different than what came before. Rick Rubin couldn't change this pattern on 1995's *Ballbreaker* and Brendan O'Brien can't change it on 2008's *Black Ice*. He encourages the band to add a bit of color here and there, so they grace "Stormy May Day" with some sloppy slide

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guitar and turn "Rock N' Roll Dream" into an expansive neo-ballad cousin of Bad Company's "Rock N Roll Fantasy," but O'Brien's crisp, colorful production only emphasizes how AC/DC could stand to be a little less careful on record.

It's the eternal AC/DC paradox: at its core, their music is brutal and primitive, but their records are slick, overly cautious, and bloated, stretching out to 15 tracks when they should be no longer than ten. AC/DC haven't lost their knack for great, simple rock & roll and Black Ice is graced by a few terrific tracks. In fact, as it opens with the "Highway to Hell" boogie of "Rock N Roll Train," the stuttering "Skies on Fire" and "Big Jack," it seems that Black Ice might be the great latter-day AC/DC record the group has yet to deliver, but as the next 12 tracks spool out over the next hour, the album slowly slides into a too-comfortable groove, fueled by too-tight rhythms and guitars that sound loud but not beefy. This polished, precise rock & roll is good enough, at least in small doses, but Black Ice delivers a whopping dose, puffed out to nearly an hour, running so long it all kind of washes together -- a problem that is endemic to all AC/DC albums after Back in Black. This shift can't be placed on the shoulders of Brian Johnson, who may never have been able to match Bon Scott no matter how much he mimics the man, but it's simply a symptom of the band's massive popularity, where they have no compelling reason to release a record every other year, so they make albums twice a decade, inevitably spending too much time sculpting their recordings when they'd be better off bashing them out. At their peak, AC/DC recorded their albums quick 'n' dirty and the music felt that way, too. Age has turned their tasteless insurgence into vulgar tradition but that's not the problem, nor is it the band's refusal to change because, let's face it, when a band does one thing this well there's no need to change. AC/DC can still sound invigorating -- and make no mistake they do here, as much as they ever do on a latter-day record -- but they just need to tighten up, cut back, crank it up, and sound a little rude again. After all, what's the point of being the filthiest band in rock & roll if you're going to make albums as polite as Black Ice? --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, allmusic.com

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