

For a fleeting period in the 1970s, Glasgow was the centre of the rock'n'roll world. And you don't have to just take Glaswegians' word for it, either – everyone knew. And the reason was the Apollo – Glasgow Apollo. It lasted 13 years as a music venue, and in that time it left an indelible mark on the music scene – a mark dripping with the dirt, fury, joy, anger, pride and humour of Glasgow.

Much of the legend of the Apollo came about by accident. Green's Playhouse opened in 1927 as the biggest cinema in Europe; with its ballroom and cafeteria, the giant building could hold 10,000 people, with just over 4,000 in the auditorium. They called Glasgow 'Cinema City' in those days; 175,000 people a day went to the movies across the town back then. But four decades later those days were gone, and the Playhouse's projectors were flickering with soft porn movies for increasingly messy masses.

Fortunately, by then rock'n'roll had come to town. On 12 June 1967, a package tour featuring Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, The Move, Amen Corner and The Nice arrived to play at Green's. The auditorium adapted to its new use beautifully, and the building's future was secured. Five years later its film projectors were gone, the 'It's Good – It's Green' foyer carpets were dyed a garish purple, and the newly named Apollo was open for rock'n'roll business.

"We'd never heard of the space missions," says Eddie Tobin, who was part of Glasgow Apollo's management team back then. "We'd only just started seeing jet planes. We named the place after the Apollo in Harlem – that's the kind of feeling we wanted to achieve." Years later Tina Turner said her

Glasgow welcome had only been matched by her Harlem one. Job done, then.

The first show under its new Apollo name (many Glaswegians called the place Green's for ever) was Johnny Cash. The management wanted to ensure artists remembered the venue, so they came up with the Apollo Oscars, a small trophy given to anyone who sold the place out. "I'll cherish it for ever," Cash said of his – and dropped it in his hotel bin.

The 'Purple Palace' was never in the best state of repair. For a start, the stage wasn't really a stage. It was a platform on which to mount the cinema screen, and sloped towards the audience for the best viewing. It was also around 16 feet high, which meant bands performed at eye-level with the first balcony. And that balcony became more infamous for its bounce – when fans jumped in time to the music, the balcony rose and fell too. "I swear I saw it rise six feet," says Francis Rossi of Status Quo. "Truly terrifying." Joe Elliott of Def Leppard also experienced the bounce while playing a support slot: "It was the most frightening and exhilarating moment of my life up till then."

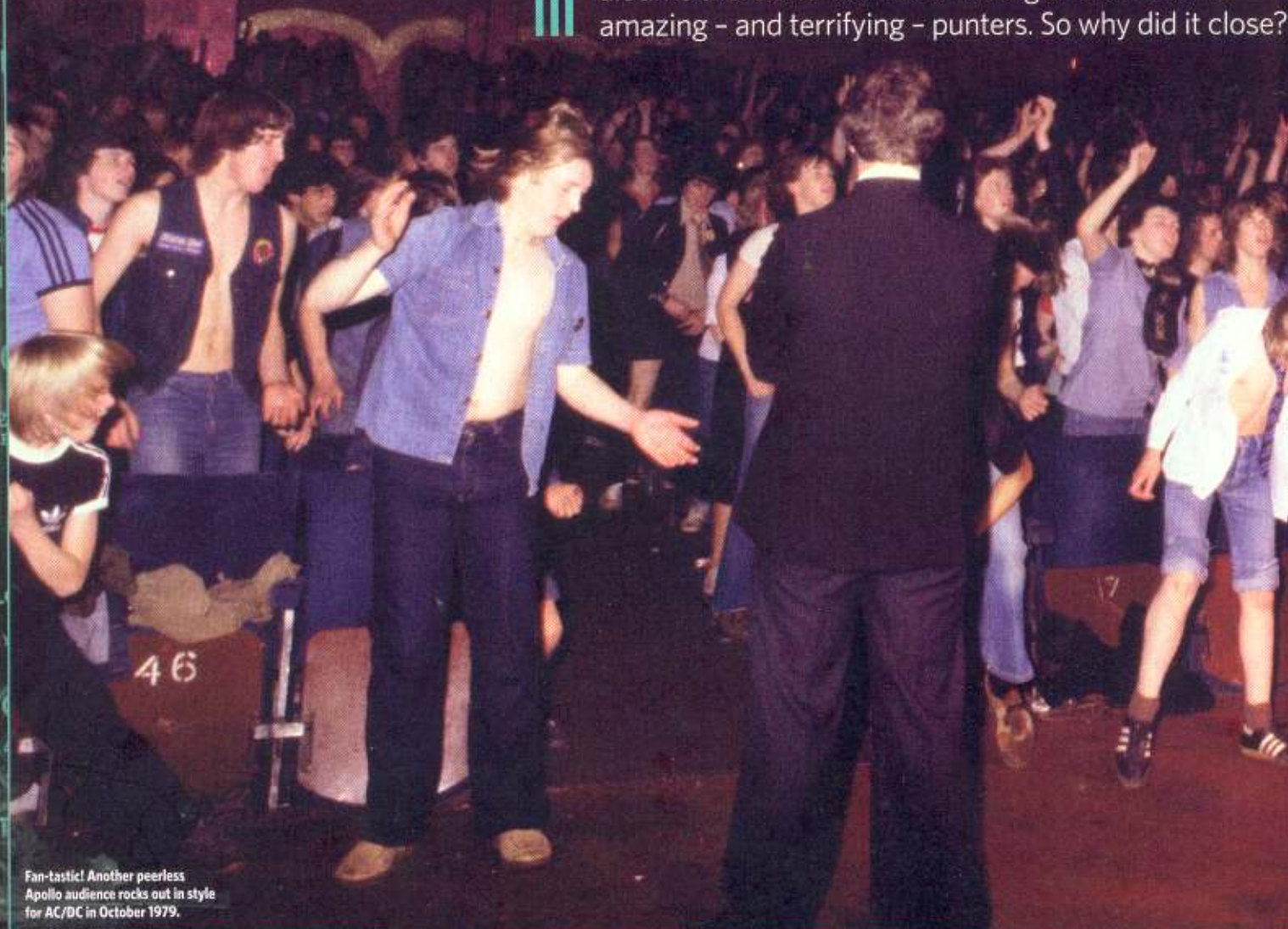
The dressing rooms were shabby, there was always leaking water, and from the stage you could see the sky through a hole in the roof. But the Apollo was more than bricks and mortar. And just as well too; it was home to 'the Glasgow Choir', the brave band of fans who became as big a part of the legend as those who played there.

It was the Glaswegian attitude encased in concert: whether they loved you or hated you, you knew it then, there, in real time, in your face. Ozzy Osbourne launched his solo career at the Apollo: "I knew if I could get the

The Apollo's 13

WORDS: MARTIN KIELTY

In its 13-year tenure, the **Glasgow Apollo** became the venue to play in the UK. AC/DC and Quo recorded live albums there and Yes wrote a song in tribute to its amazing – and terrifying – punters. So why did it close?



Fan-tastic! Another peerless Apollo audience rocks out in style for AC/DC in October 1979.

crowd there to like me I could get *anyone* to like me". Sting began the Police's *Synchronicity* show with: "Do you know why we're here? This is the best gig in Britain." When Thin Lizzy played a show there in 1978, Phil Lynott wore a Scotland football shirt to show his love for the audience. Yes went one better by writing a song for The Choir – which was played only once.

On the other hand, when Richard Jobson of The Skids refused to play TV Stars (their crowd pleasing ode to soap stars, with the chorus 'Albert Tatlock!') for the hordes, wee Jim Wyper was helped on to the stage and sang it for him and, with the Choir behind him, the band joined in. David Sylvian left the stage in tears when Japan were heckled by the crowd waiting for Blue Oyster Cult. The trio America were berated for playing their set instead of going straight to their hit *Horse With No Name*. "We've got a programme here – we're professional musicians!" one of the band pleaded. "Who telt ye that?" came a riposte.

With the threat of violence ever present in the hall, the single worst trick The Choir could pull was to turn their backs on the stage – four thousand people facing away must have ended a career or two.

The aggressive atmosphere wasn't eased one bit by the Apollo's bouncers, who turned the place into something of a micro-police state. It was an all-seated venue, but many of the seats were impossible to sit on. That minor point meant nothing to the bouncers, however, who would force people down in their seat, bare nails and all, tearing many a fine jacket. A drunken girl once took off her shoes during a show, and while she was looking for them later the bouncers threw her out into the snow for being not having footwear. One young punk was worried about his girlfriend, and asked permission to look for her in the ladies' toilets. As soon as he tried, he was thrown out the front door – which the bouncers didn't bother to open first.

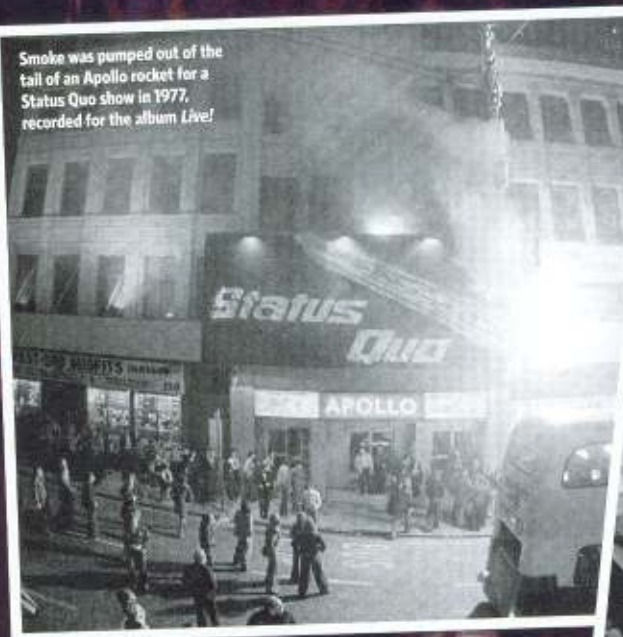
The bouncers had an infamous war with The Stranglers and their fans. On the band's first Apollo appearance, Hugh Cornwell took offence to the way some staff were treating

fans, and had spotlights shone on the offending bouncers. In revenge, the bouncers left the room and a stage-rush ensued. After the show the band needed protection from the protectors, with karate black-belt bassist JJ Burnel inviting the bouncers outside one by one.

But the bouncers weren't all or always trouble. One bouncer agreed not to kick out a misbehaving girl if she'd go out on a date with him; they're married to this day. Intrepid illegal photographer Bryan Herdman was finally caught after years of sneaking in with two cameras, two lenses and all manner of accessories – and the security guys were so impressed they let him back in.

Looking after the Glasgow Choir can't have been an easy job. They used all manner of tricks for getting in free, including the 'matchbox out the window' one in which you folded your ticket to make it look like it had been clipped, then went to the gents, put it in a matchbox and threw it out of the window to where your mates waited below. It's incredible →

Smoke was pumped out of the tail of an Apollo rocket for a Status Quo show in 1977, recorded for the album *Live!*



Scott by name, Scot by nature: AC/DC frontman Bon at the Apollo.



'Ozzy Osbourne launched his solo career at the Apollo: "I knew if I could get the crowd there to like me I could get *anyone* to like me."

It may not have looked much from the outside, but once inside...



After the final curtain came down in 1985, so, two years later, did the building.



Phil Lynott gets the audience inside.

'Wearing the Scotland top, Phil put his hand to his heart and said: "Champions".'

to believe, but the Apollo had an alcohol licence on only one occasion (nowadays you just can't have rock'n'roll without a drink, especially in Glasgow), so the tricks for sneaking booze in were legion too. One of the best was to visit the tearoom during the day and hide your stash in the tiling above the toilets, then recover it during the show that night. A similar trick enabled a entire reel-to-reel tape recorder to be smuggled in on more than one occasion.

The bouncers weren't heavy with just the audience, mind. The title of Rush's live album *Exit Stage Left* alludes to the fact that if you did the opposite, you wound up in the lane outside the venue, from which it was tough to return. Both David Lee Roth and Bon Scott found themselves locked out during shows they were playing there, and had to work hard to persuade the door staff to let them back in to continue. You can imagine the scene: "But I'm in the band!" "Aye, right, son - ah've heard it all afore. Get ti' fuck."

As a venue, the Apollo was hugely eclectic, with everyone from Abba to Zappa having played there. But despite the ebbs and flows of taste and fashion, it was always primarily a rock venue. Whatever it says about the audience, the most fondly remembered bands are AC/DC, Status Quo, Thin Lizzy and 'locals' The Sensational Alex Harvey Band. Apart from SAHB all those bands gigged into double figures at the Purple Palace, and sold out every time. The mighty AC/DC recorded their thunderous *If You Want Blood...* live album there, and footage of them playing the Apollo appears on the *Family Jewels* DVD.

After one of AC/DC's many Glasgow shows, Angus Young was invited to a house party by two 14-year-old boys. During the festivities the parents returned unexpectedly, and the revellers - including Angus - had to sneak out of a back window. It's probably the only time a rock star found himself in the back streets of the notorious Drumchapel estate, with no idea where he was or how to get back to the city centre.

Brian Johnson believes the spirit of Bon Scott remained in the Apollo - and is the reason why a chunk of plaster fell on his head the first time he fronted AC/DC there.

When Status Quo recorded their *Quo Live!* album at the Apollo, they gave the audience memorial badges that proudly proclaimed: 'I'm on the album'.

The Apollo, of course, was The Sensational Alex Harvey Band's home show. And the crowning glory of that most theatrical of bands was their 1975 Christmas Shows, of which five took place in Glasgow. "We were at our absolute best," says SAHB guitarist Zal Cleminson. "Everything we'd done pointed towards those shows, and doing the best ones in Glasgow was just how it had to be. We still can't believe they were never filmed. It would have been the best live footage ever."

Thin Lizzy frontman Phil Lynott really 'got' the Apollo, and got right into it. It helped that Lizzy had local hero guitarist Brian Robertson in the band, but it wasn't all Robbo. Wearing a Scotland football shirt on stage, Phil put his hand to his heart and said: "Champions" - whether he meant the hopes of the

Scotland World Cup team or the Glasgow Choir was irrelevant; for the rest of the night you could hardly hear the music for cheering.

One gets the feeling the Apollo was too Glaswegian for many a politician. The council chiefs were known as the 'city fathers', which stinks of austere Presbyterian Scottishness - and their attitude to rock fans supported the view. It was always notable that the behaviour of the Glasgow Choir was under the microscope, while football hooligans got away with far worse behaviour every week. It's one of the reasons why the venue was never granted an alcohol licence - one of the reasons the place could never remain open.

The Apollo had been forced to close in 1978, but a public petition of more than 100,000 signatures - one in six Glaswegians - led to new management being able to bring it back, and it survived until 1985, squeezing stay after stay of execution from the waiting bulldozers.

As the 1980s sailed by, the Apollo had become increasingly decrepit and out-of-date. There was no call for a 10,000 capacity building; most of the competing venues in Scotland had been refurbished; more than £2m was needed for basic safety repairs at the Apollo; and the city fathers were keen to move music events to the bright new SECC, which they said (fied) would be a much better venue. It never has been, to this day.

When Paul Weller's Style Council brought the curtain down for the last time on June 16, 1985, the venue had been called the Apollo for some time. Which is not to say it wasn't held in as much affection as ever, because it was. And still is. The building rotted and eventually caught fire. During its demolition, thousands of the Choir broke into the site and stole chairs and even just bricks, or just took the opportunity to stand on the stage, looking out at Glasgow's changing skyline instead of the thousands of passionate rock heroes so many bands had faced.

The Apollo may have been laid to rest, but it's still alive in so many people's hearts and memories, and on live albums resonating with the voices of the Choir.

One million people have visited the ApolloMemories.com website, and the answer to the question posed there, 'Why did it matter?' is in what they've written in their answers online. X

Martin Kiely's book about the Apollo, *Apollo Memories*, is published by NWP. Visit www.apollomemories.com for more info.



A-Z OF THE APOLLO

AC/DC: recorded *If You Want Blood* there.

Blondie: broadcast live Hogmanay show from the venue.

Johnny Cash: played the Apollo's first show, in '73.

Dave Parsons: brought Sham 69's farewell show to the Apollo, where Sex Pistols Paul Cook and Steve Jones guested on four songs.

Elton John: enjoyed the audience so much he went back on stage and played a second show.

The Faces: got so drunk before show, they had to be carried from taxi to dressing room.

Gary Numan: first full-size show at the Apollo - with remote control pyramids that all broke down.

Harlem: the location of the original Apollo, after which the Glasgow venue was named. Ian Gillan Band: Bernie Torme nearly died in a sky-harness accident in which his guitar neck went right through the floor of the stage.

JJ Burnel: Stranglers bassist tried to fight all the bouncers after they hassled fans.

Kiss: some fans set fire to their faces trying to imitate the band's fire-eating stunt.

Lindsayfane: their only ever 'mobbed by screaming girls' experience took place outside the Apollo.

Midge Ure: was in the Apollo disco's house band, Slik, before joining Ultravox.

Noddy Holder: wouldn't sing *Merry Xmas Everybody* because it was January, so the audience sang it for him and he conducted.

The Osmonds: brought a market research team to record audience reaction to each song. Police: Sting said: "This is the best gig in Britain."

Queen: Freddie invited ferocious Glasgow bikers to a champagne breakfast in his bed.

Bay City Rollers: At the height of Rollermania the band were sent home in Range Rovers while the venue staff rode in their limousines.

Saxon: Biff Byford threw an axe across the stage and severed the PA's power cables.

T. Rex: Marc Bolan was carried on in a big glittery star, toppled and fell off the stage. Uriah Heep: played the last proper rock show that took place at the Apollo.

Van Halen: during a show David Lee Roth ran out of the wrong door, unwittingly left the venue and wasn't allowed back in.

The Who: when they trashed a dressing room, Apollo management overcharged them so the backstage area could be refurbished.

Yes: adored the venue so much they wrote a song for the audience.

ZZ Top: faked a roadie's death during a show.