

# "LEPPARD IS A FAMILY"

FRONTMAN **JOE ELLIOTT** STILL LIVES AND BREATHES **DEF LEPPARD**, THE BAND HE STARTED IN SHEFFIELD BACK IN 1977 AND LED TO BARELY IMAGINABLE WORLDWIDE SUCCESS IN THE '80S. IN AN IN-DEPTH AND FASCINATING INTERVIEW WITH *ALISON JOY*, ELLIOTT DISSECTS EXACTLY WHY HIS GROUP BECAME ONE OF THE UK'S BIGGEST EVER SUCCESS STORIES...

**THERE'S NO POINT ASKING** Joe Elliott if he wants to get rocked. It's like questioning the Pope on whether he's Catholic or quizzing a bear as to whether he dumps in the woods. Rock, and indeed music of many kinds, runs deep through the Def Leppard frontman's veins, pulses through his heart and keeps his soul afloat. It's a love affair that has helped sustain him through a tumultuous career, and the passion is just as strong now as when he was a teenage dreamer in his bedroom in Sheffield.

Joe's dreams, as we know, became Technicolor reality, and the latest accolade on the Def Leppard mantelpiece is their induction into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame at a ceremony in New York on the same day this magazine goes on sale – 29 March. It's been a long time coming, so it's the perfect opportunity for a catch-up with the main man about becoming a RRHOF inductee, as well as looking back over those stratospheric years that took the band from Yorkshire zeroes to all-conquering heroes.

**I KICK** off by asking Joe where RRHOF induction ranks for him in his not-inconsiderable arsenal of achievements.

"Not at the top, I'll be honest, not yet," he says. "Does it resonate with me in a negative way? Absolutely not. Does it make me stand up with pride the same way as when I heard 'Animal' on the radio for the first time? No. Or when we got our first number one album? No. It's the things where there's a union of us and the people who put us where we are, our crowd, that make me feel proud of what we've done. I remember those the most, like the Don Valley show in Sheffield where we had over 45-50,000 people turn up to see us in our home city almost 15 years to the day since we formed. It was crazy!"

**THE GLITTERING** RRHOF ceremony in New York is a world away from the lives of the fledgling Leppard in

late 1970s Sheffield. Frustrated by knowing they "weren't going to get anywhere by just playing these crappy gigs in Sheffield where there were no A&R men," they produced a three-track EP (cunningly titled 'The Def Leppard EP') that was released in January 1979.

"It gave us a massive opportunity," remembers Joe. "Even the fact it was on vinyl made a difference. Everyone sent cassettes to A&R men and they ended up being paperweights, or just got thrown in the bin. We did three songs ['Ride Into The Sun', 'Getcha Rocks Off' and 'The Overture'], we pressed 1,000 copies on vinyl and put the record in a picture sleeve to grab attention."

The EP was dispatched to the music papers, the BBC and Radio Hallam – a local station based in Sheffield with a rock show hosted by Colin Slade. There was also support from Keith Strong, a journalist at the *Sheffield Star* newspaper (as a local girl, I hung on to Keith's every word.) Joe touted the EP around the record shops and jumped onstage with a copy when BBC Radio 1 DJ John Peel appeared at a disco at the city's university.

"He probably thought I was trying to mug him!" laughs Joe. "I said, 'Play this!' He said, 'I can't, I don't know what it is! Put your phone number on it and I'll call you.' He phoned the next day and then played a song off the EP five nights in a row."

A copy of the EP was also sent to Geoff Barton, an influential metal writer on music weekly *Sounds*. In June 1979 Geoff headed to Sheffield with photographer Ross Halfin to see Def Leppard perform at Crookes Working Men's Club, close to where Joe lived with his parents.

"I picked them up from the station in my works van, Geoff in the passenger seat and Ross and his gear rolling around in the back," says Joe. "I took them to my mum and dad's for cheese sandwiches and a cup of tea."

Later that evening, the club's 25p-a-pint subsidised