

# LEGENDS Of rock

by Rick Evans

For a band that never enjoyed much success in America, Sweet surely left their mark. Ask Twisted Sister's Dee Snider or Motley Crue's Nikki Sixx what band helped shape their rock-and-roll attitude, and Sweet will be one of the first names to escape their lips. During their decade-long career, vocalist Brian Connolly, guitarist Andy Scott, bassist Steve Priest and drummer Mick Tucker, traveled a bizarre musical route, along which they evolved from the original frills-and-lace glam-rock band, into a seminal force in the heavy-metal maelstrom.

Formed by Tucker and Connolly in 1968, the band soon added Scott and Priest, and fell under the guidance of the British songwriting team, Nicky Chinn and Mike Chapman. The partnership instantly yielded a string of infectious, instantly memorable bubble-gum hits like *Little Willy*, *Wig Wam Bam* and *Ballroom Blitz*, which rocketed Sweet onto radio playlists throughout the world. In addition, the band performed its concerts dressed in six-inch heels, makeup, and lace clothing, causing them to be banned and labeled "perverted" by a number of English theatres.

"It was all great fun in the beginning," Priest recalled. "We were basically the tools of Chinn and Chapman who, in addition to writing all the songs, were managing us. We never felt particularly

self-conscious about the music we played or about the way we looked. We knew we were capable of better, but with so many bands out there starving, we were very willing to do almost anything to be successful — at least for a while."

Despite ever-escalating sales, by 1974, the band had grown tired of what they viewed as the restrictive nature of the Chinn-Chapman dynasty. After a messy series of legal battles, the group managed to extricate themselves from the pair's control, and set out on their own. While many so-called experts, including both Chinn and Chapman, predicted the group would come crawling back after a few months, Sweet were determined to change their style and succeed on their own terms.

"In the mid-Seventies, progressive rock was big," Priest said. "We didn't want to go in that direction but, at the same time, groups like Deep Purple were showing, with songs like *Smoke On The Water*, that a band could rock yet still be successful. That was what we wanted to do."

Turning up their amps on such wall-shaking hits as *Fox On The Run*, *Set Me Free* and *Action* (the latter two of which were covered by Saxon and Black 'N Blue respectively on recent LPs), Sweet quickly cast aside their teeny-bop appeal. With Scott's Ritchie Blackmore-inspired riffs leading the way, the band managed the difficult task of gaining an entirely new

following while maintaining their commercial clout.

"We felt much more at home with the type of music we began playing once we were on our own," Priest explained. "I know that many of our original fans were more than a little upset when we put away the makeup and frills, but it was part of our musical growth."

Unfortunately, just as the band was building their following with the hit albums, **Give Us A Wink** and **Strung Up**, Connolly, the band's dynamic blond frontman, quit the band to seek fame and fortune on his own. While his move eventually proved disastrous for both Connolly and the group, Sweet continued on and produced their biggest hit ever, *Love Is Like Oxygen*, in 1978. Since that time, rumors of Sweet's imminent return have been bandied about in the rock press but, except for an embarrassing recent display by a band called Sweet — that, of the band's original four members, featured only Connolly — those rumors remain unsubstantiated. According to Priest, they may unfortunately stay that way.

"There has been quite a bit of interest in us reforming, but we don't know if we really want to," he said. "I wouldn't say that the matter is totally dead, but each day that goes by makes it less and less likely to happen. Perhaps it would just be best to sit back and rest on what we once accomplished." □

# SWEET



Sweet (left to right): Mick Tucker, Steve Priest, Andy Scott, Brian Connolly.