

# Status Quo

*A British institution, Status Quo just keep on rocking. After a triumphant final tour with the original Frantic Four line up, Francis Rossi and Rick Parfitt returned to the current Quo unit comprising of keyboard player Andy Bown, John 'Rhino' Edwards on bass and drummer Leon Cave. There had been talk of a new album, but few people expected it to be acoustic! James Gaden reunited with guitarist/vocalist Francis Rossi to figure out what on earth is going on. Photo by Bryan Adams.*

**I absolutely love 'Aquostic (Stripped Bare)' – I expected it to be good, but it's far exceeded my expectations. Some of the arrangements on here are just brilliant!**

Good, I really hope people respond to it like you have. There was a guy called Jeff Smith at Radio 2 who was pushing for it. He had two things he wanted to do to finish his career. One was to get Jeff Lynne to play with E.L.O. which he just did in Hyde Park, it was phenomenal. The other was to get Quo to do an acoustic album. I never intended doing a fucking acoustic album! We'd done an acoustic version of 'Down Down' for an Australian advert and it got Rick enthused a bit, but I still had to get behind it. Rick couldn't be there for the start of it with things going on in his personal life, so he had to come in later on. John, Andrew and I sat down with Mike Paxman [producer] and Gregg Jackman, the engineer. We started on the 5<sup>th</sup> May and the first song we did was 'And It's Better Now' which has been chosen as the single. I've always loved the song and there was a great vibe about it. Then we tried 'Paper Plane' and by the end of the afternoon I listened back and thought "Fuck me, I really like 'Paper Plane'." I've always thought we had good melodies, but often we have these twee little melodies buried underneath all the noise going on. I got really into these versions and the project got longer and longer.

We got a harmonica in and an accordion, which is a perfect instrument for something like this, then some string arrangements... everything snowballed and I thought it was fucking fab. But then, I am going to say that to you, aren't I? I'm doing promo, I'm not going to say "My God, we've just done a right pile of shit... do you want to buy it?" I hope you can tell by my voice how pleased I am with it. It's led me to do something I've not really done for twenty years, which is analyse it, I was playing it back the other night and got all sorts of doubts. So far though, the reaction has been like yours, people think it's really, really good. I do worry I'm preaching to the converted though. Until it goes on general release and records start flying out the door... I think the project needs to reach outside of the usual people. The pluggers at Radio 2 chose to go with 'And It's Better Now' and I wasn't sure that was the right choice.

**From my point of view, the material works that well, you could easily have picked any one of about twelve songs on**

**here as a single.**

That's what we thought! You sound like you're in our camp, you obviously like a lot of the songs, so would one of them have been better? I think 'Paper Plane' has the wow factor, but there's the risk people say "So what, I've heard that before!" which probably won't be the case with 'And It's Better Now'. I love how we've done 'Rocking All Over The World' and 'Whatever You Want' too.

**I think you've got a good mix on the album, it's not all obvious choices. Sure, the classics are there, but you've got some deep album cuts and good stuff from later periods, like 'Rock 'Til you Drop'.**

Oh, 'Rock 'Til you Drop' is magnificent. I always loved that song, Andrew wrote it and I think the version on here is just fabulous. It was tricky to find songs for Rick to do. Rick always wants to do this sort of "Rock" thing, I've told you this before, I think he's pretending, that's not who he really is. He's always trying to be "Rick The Rocker". We tried 'Rain' and it just didn't work. We managed to get 'Again And Again' down which we were all happy with, and we did 'Don't Drive My Car'. I've never

liked that song – I love playing it but never liked the track itself – the same could be said for 'Again And Again', yet here those are two of the ones I enjoy the most! John Edwards came back with a reworking of 'Rain' and suddenly it worked, we could do something with it. The juices got going and it was thrilling to do it, because when I was really young, all I wanted to do was strum and sing. I didn't think I had a good enough voice, I reluctantly became a lead guitarist which is why I'm behind everybody else and never quite caught up! Now it's almost like I've got to where I started, which is doing what I always wanted, strum a song and sing it. However, we could get to the release date and it could stiff on its arse.

**(Laughs) Yeah, it could, or it could go down really well and give you a whole other option to explore. I can picture this on a stage with a string section and an accordion player, because the songs still retain the foot tapping, feel-good vibe that I always associate with Quo.**

Oh, I think that is something we could do. It's not something Rick might be keen on because he still wants to be in the Frantic Four at the moment, I don't know what's going on with him there. There's that thing of "Oh, well it's not Quo." Don't think fucking Quo! When we were in 1968, look at the band then, then look at the band in 1972. What the fuck happened? By that logic, in 1972 we "weren't being Quo". Good job we weren't, because we became that other thing that people remember! Maybe it could happen again. The timing would be marvellous. I'm 65, I get friggling tired, I've got a knee injury, a recurring hernia, all these things. Rick's getting older, we get forgetful, we're all getting there, that physical thing I

said to you for years that Quo has to have, that energy, we can't do that forever. If we could go off with this other direction it would be like winning the lottery. Or it could stiff.

**The thing that really surprised me about 'Aquostic...' was despite the fact there are over twenty songs on it, it absolutely flew past.**

I found that myself, I always think there are too many tracks. With the advent of CD years ago, we started to do that way back to give "value for money". But I grew up with ten tracks, nineteen minutes a side. Now you can make albums that last about an hour and twenty minutes. I think anybody, after about fifty minutes you think "fucking hell, I've had enough now." I don't care who it is – except maybe Jeff Lynne! But like you say, that doesn't happen with this. It finishes and you go "Oh!" There's no ear fatigue with it.

**After the Frantic Four stuff, if you'd come out with a new Quo album with the current line up, it would draw comparisons with the Frantic Four... this way, you've done something completely different.**

A few people have commented that we should have used Alan Lancaster and John Coghlan for this project, but without knocking them, they couldn't do it. Sorry, but they are of that time. I spoke to Alan the other day and he's still very set on how great it was way back when. He's right, it was great, but you can't do that forever. After 'Quid Pro Quo', I thought we were sort of full up at the point. Writing wise, I felt like I'd been down every possible avenue and we were getting to be like an AC/DC record. The songs were all pretty much the same key, the same beats per minute... if you look at the so called "classic" Quo albums like 'Piledriver' and 'Hello', or 'On The Level', they had highs and lows. Rick wrote these lovely little tunes and Bob Young and I would write stuff that would lean into Blues or Country occasionally, Alan and I would write something with a 50s, almost Del Shannon style, and you got a nice mix. People now try and convince me we just rocked and Quo albums never had that. I don't know what they're talking about!

**Did you revisit to the old albums again for ideas?**

The albums were all there but without blowing my own trumpet, if I did it, I know it. There's the odd time when you think "Oh, how did that bit go?" but what I did find was most of the songs I wrote with Bob were actually written on acoustic. Some were on piano, only a handful were done on electric. One was 'Roll Over Lay Down'. A guy said to me we could have done that one and I thought we couldn't, and then I thought about it and thought "Actually, you know what..." So in this world we live in, we'll probably make a sequel. People say "Oh, if they had the integrity, they wouldn't do it." That's a bunch of shite. We live in a capitalist world! The logical thing to do would be a sequel, so I'd definitely look at 'Roll Over Lay Down', I'd

like to do 'Twenty Wild Horses', there's a lot I'd like to try.

**You played on Hayseed Dixie's cover of 'Down Down' and that's what this album reminded me of, how they take completely different instruments and arrangements, yet the song's feel stays intact, you instantly know what it is.**

People thought these versions would have the same rhythm and we'd have to pad them out with intros and guitar solos, to make it more 'Rock'. The Hayseed Dixie thing, and when we did that advert, I thought it was good. When you take away all the noise, you hear the melody and think "Oh, that's lovely". I hope the melodies come through more now. You can't make a record where you don't get into what you are doing. Sometimes, six months down the line, you'll listen back and think "What the fuck was I doing?" but when you're into it, you're into it and I'm into this one right now. Obviously most of them are my songs and talking to someone like yourself, I know I'm kind of preaching to the converted, but I have to say the feedback so far has been pretty



phenomenal. I hope people find something new in these old songs with the way these have been done. As long as people get past the 'Rock' thing. It does bother me, that, men and their testicles. "I'm a man, I really am, I pull mean faces and have tattoos, I'm quite nasty!" Like those songs 'Born Under A Bad Sign' and 'Bad To The Bone' – so if you're 'Bad To The Bone', you're a bit of a shit then, aren't you? (laughs)

**'Aquostic...' also features a classic album cover with your trademark sense of humour. Did you or Rick argue over who needed the bigger guitar?**

It should be obvious who has the bigger guitar. (laughs) I actually argued with our manager when he suggested it, I thought it was belittling the product. That shows how much I was into the music. But Simon, our manager, is such a marketing man - since around the time of the Spice Girls, marketing is key, it's not about the music. If you don't get in with the marketing, no fucker will hear you, it's sad these days. So even if people look at it and say "Look at what those two dickheads have done!" the cover has done its job, people are aware it's out there. We've had so much

coverage already and the album's not even out for another few weeks. I showed my wife the cover and she loved it, she thought it was great! Eh? I thought she'd go "Oh no!" but she loved it. Again, from a marketing angle, we used Bryan Adams to take the photos. I didn't even know Bryan did that, but he's in with all the groovy people and he was great, because he's been on the other side of the camera, he was good and quick. Suddenly Bryan Adams taking the photo becomes a talking point, if we'd used any other photographer nobody would have given it a second thought. So whether people see the poster and think "Dickheads!" or "Oh, our boys, aren't they great!" the image is doing its job, it's generating comment.

**I think it endears you to the project before you've even heard it. The cover makes you smile, it disarms any negative thoughts you might have about it being an "acoustic" record, that it might be maudlin or slow or not "Quo". You put it on and you really aren't ready for how good the music is.**

That's a very good point, I think you've read that very well. There will inevitably be people thinking "Oh God, what have they done?" without even hearing it. I love our fans to death but there are some who just moan. There's no right or wrong, there's no pleasing everybody. Compare it to the Scottish issue – half the people say yes and half say no. So whatever happens, a bunch of people are fucked... Oh, you've got me on politics now, this is your fault, can't we talk about fireworks, you write about them don't you?

**We actually had a letter of complaint from a guy who bought our magazine and said it was the "height of stupidity" to name our magazine Fireworks when we didn't have anything about actual fireworks in it. The fact he bought it from the music section of WHSmiths and we had some famous musician like Slash of the cover was neither here nor there.**

(Laughs) That's such a British thing, "Oh, I bought this and it's not right..." A picture of a guy in leather trousers, daft hat, fag in his mouth, Les Paul in his hand, there's a few clues there!

**Our editor commented that he wondered if he'd bought 'Mayfair' hoping for articles on expensive property in London.**

(Laughs) Oh, I like that! That's very good. That was a weird magazine, it tried to be posh porn. All glitzy and glamour shots – no muff ever looked as good as it did in that magazine! As long as there are no shots of them squatting with no underwear on. Put the knickers back on, then I'll have a look! I like the sense of mystery, when I can't see it, I want to have a look. When it's blatantly there... I like searching for it. I know what's there, I know what I'm going to find, but I want to look for it! Aah... right, on that note, I think I'd better go now, hadn't I? (laughs)