

# TAKING IT A STEP AT A TIME

**Everybody knows Francis Rossi as the frontman for Status Quo, a band he has played guitar and sung with for over four decades. Together with fellow guitarist/vocalist Rick Parfitt, they are recognised as a British institution. During their tenure they have released nearly thirty studio albums, plus numerous live documents and compilations, and had more hit singles than any other act, along with shifting 118 million albums. In all that time, Rick only briefly dallied with the idea of a solo career, making an album which to this day is still unreleased (although many tracks surfaced as B-sides) and Francis made one album, 'King Of the Dog House' back in 1996, which was penned almost entirely by outside writers. Now, in 2010, Francis is preparing to release a brand new solo record called 'One Step At A Time', this time featuring all original songs. James Gaden rang Francis at his studio to find out all about the album, the fact Francis will go out on his first ever solo tour to promote it, what not to do in the music business, and which lettuce is the best for salad.**

**Hi, it's James from Fireworks Magazine.**  
Who works?

**Fireworks!**  
(Laughs) I remember! Sorry, I was just in the middle of trying to write a verse with Bob (Young).

**Sorry, hope I didn't spoil the flow!**

Well no, it's good you're calling, it means people are still interested in what I'm doing and so I have to keep doing it. Never mind, you get me on my soapbox and I'll be on Speaker's Corner if you let me go.

**(Laughs) Firstly, how's Rick? I saw in the press that he hadn't been well.**

He's fine.

**Ah, good, I saw it in the paper but hadn't seen anything on Quo's site, so I wondered if they'd made something out of nothing.**

They certainly did. His son isn't well, he's in trouble at the moment, but no, Rick is fine.

**Good, excellent. On to the reason I'm calling, which is your solo record. I got the promo and I have listened to it a lot, I really like it. It reminds me a bit of 'Thirsty Work', it's like a sequel to that for me, with the more pop influences there...**

It's more me I suppose. I can't get away from it. A lot of Quo fans think I have that rock thing going on... even Rick, somebody said to Rick in the seventies that he wasn't very rock and roll and Rick tried desperately to be, like there's something wrong with being something else. There's this macho image about "being rock", like "hey, you're a man!" Obviously I'm not a man then, because I like pop music, country music, I like it all. Most of the songs on this record, I could have maybe made them harder sounding, but I do them and enjoy them as they are. I wanted to do an album, I mentioned it to the manager, then a record company got interested, and then it was "well you'll have to do some shows". I don't want to do any shows! Then I thought well, maybe I do! So now, I'm shitting myself about the shows!

**(Laughs) Why?**

Well I'll be singing all bloody night for a start! I like to wander round the stage and let Rick sing! But I'm glad you like it. It's funny, making a solo album, because normally I know that some people will like something, and you jockey with them about what will go on the record and what doesn't, but there's nobody to fight with this time! Hold on a second, it's my wife...

*(I'm then privy to one side of a conversation in the Rossi household that stands the test of time as one of the most rock and roll things I've ever heard...)*

I'm doing the salad. We got Iceberg? What? Did you hear that? She's shouting. Don't marry an American, they're not nice. This one's tall and she's not nice. I'll murder her out of pity for myself. Hang on... no, I don't want that shit do I? I like Iceberg. I'll make the lettuce, the salad tonight. I'll... hang on, this interview's a waste of time now, I'm not doing a solo record, I'm getting divorced! I'll have Iceberg. I'll do the salad. God love the woman, she takes all sorts of shit from me. I don't know why.

**(Laughs) If you want these tapes as an alibi if you do commit murder as your defence, just let me know.**

(Laughs) Oh, she'll love that! Where were we up to? I'm waffling!

**We said about you not having to fight anyone in the band because it's a solo venture.**

Yeah, it's a unusual thing. We try and keep things democratic in the band but there's always going to be the odd fight. I could try and dictate I suppose, but I'm more interesting in democracy and hearing what people think. But then you realise some have their own agenda, they might not like a certain song simply because it's not "rocky" enough. Alan Lancaster, when he was in the band, had a serious problem with some stuff. He'd get really embarrassed by stuff like 'Dirty Water' or 'Margarita Time', and I mean really embarrassed. I'd be like "What's the matter with you?", you know? It comes from a testicle place I think - it's a lot of bollocks, but some men have this macho feeling about music. I don't have that, music hits me and I love it. That was the main thing with this album, nobody was there to say 'oh, I don't like that one'. I like that one, I'm putting it on! I just go through some strange thoughts about it like why now, why did I wait this long, who the bloody hell cares, what's the point, but I'm doing it!

**I was going to say what a long time it's been, because you only made one other solo record which was 'King Of the Doghouse'...**

Yeah, and I let somebody else take control of that, because I was a bit down at that point. I should have taken control of it. This one is just me and an engineer in a room with my songs. I'm sitting here with Bob now doing stuff and we have to do some sleeve notes and he said we need to list who is on the album. Nick, my son, played something, John Edwards played something, Andrew (Bown) played something, two or three other keyboard players played something. I played some bass, but I don't remember who played what, where or when! That's another thing when I was thinking about this record, I thought oh, I should know all that! But I'll put a list of all the people that are on it - fuck knows what they all did! (Laughs) It's all new to me, this! It's like having short hair, it's all new! I always think I'm being really wild and different when I do something, like in the eighties, when I was wearing suits I was thinking 'Look at me mother, aren't I wild!' But she mentioned that people had worn suits before me and I thought 'Oh yeah, they have haven't they...' I'm not the first. But I've got short hair! No, there's lots of old guys with short hair and a bald bit at the back. Common as fucking muck. (laughs)

**With the promo, literally all I've got is a paper sleeve with the song titles. I presume they're all new ones you've written, unlike 'King Of The Doghouse'...**

Yeah, these are all mine and Bob's. Oh, there's two by myself and a bloke called Guy Johnson who came to my house when he was about nineteen. I've been interested in working with him for years, he's a lovely bloke and we write together now and again. One song we wrote, called 'Here I Go', we did in Jersey a few years ago and a few years back before I moved we wrote 'One Step At

A Time'. I think that's my favourite on the album. But the rest of it, that's all me and Bob. There's one I decided on for the set, and that's 'Old Time Rock And Roll', 'cos I like it. But the rest of the set will be pretty much mine and Bob's stuff. I won't be doing anything that isn't Francis Rossi so to speak. I'll try and do most of the album, but there'll be some Quo songs in there. One thing I realised while putting a set together is some Quo songs are about four or five minutes. You put in four of them, and you've done twenty minutes. All my songs are about three minutes - three or four of them, and I've only done twelve minutes! (laughs). So the set could get bogged down with too many tunes. All those things are bothering me - because I've never been in another band! I've only ever been in one band. I'm the only person who didn't join Quo. Fuck, this is weird! Half of me is like 'Aw, yeah!' and the other half is going 'Oh no!'

**(Laughs) I think it'll be good. You've not booked yourself on a huge tour, you're doing six shows, so there's enough time to enjoy yourself but it's not going to take you out of your comfort zone for too long.**

Yeah, but the insecure little showoff in me needs to know he's sold a few tickets. The Glee Club in Cardiff, I hate clubs, I'm not looking forward to that at all. Now I'm asking how are the tickets selling and they're saying 'so so...' Shit, I'd forgotten what it was like to deal with all that! But then again, would I want to do it in front of a large Quo audience - I'm not sure of that either! I'm only used to being on stage with Quo. I'm used to certain things and certain ways, so I might start panicking. The show off in me will worry if it doesn't start well, the professional in me will say just get through it. I suppose I won't know until I've done a show. I'm in the dark. I don't know how the band sounds, do I? If I do an interview about Quo, I know what we sound like, but this is new. Everything I'm about to do is uncharted territory. I'm thinking shit, do I really want to do this? But I'm committed now, everything is in motion. But that said, you catch me in another mood, I might say 'oh yes, I'm so looking forward to it!' (laughs)

**I think once you've got a show under your belt and you know how the set flows and how everything sounds, you'll be better.**

Yeah, I think you're right, it's like trying a pair of shoes on for the first time, before they become really comfortable.

**I saw on the press release I received that you're going out with an eight piece band. So what extras are you adding, a brass section?**

No, I was gonna go brass - I love a bit of brass chuck, but I've got two guitar players. One of my sons, Nicholas, I've always wanted to take out on the road with me, he's coming, and John Edwards' son, who I've known since he was born, he's a nice boy and I like his guitar playing. I said to him years ago if I went out, did he want to come, and he was only about twelve at the time but he said 'ooh, yeah!'. So he's coming. He's very, very good. I've got Paul Hirsch on keyboards, Gary Twigg on bass who I've known for years, a drummer who played on the album called Leon Cave... what a name! He sounds like a star doesn't he? So two guitars, bass, drummer, my guitar, keyboards and two girl singers. I always wanted girls singing with me. That's another thing, tunes on the album like 'Crazy For You' and 'Sleeping On the Job' which have Quo leanings, if I had a guy singing the harmony parts, where Rick would normally be, it would just make it sound like Quo. So the idea is put a girl above me - oooer! Put her in the mix, I just love her voice, and there are things she did on there, for me, it's better than porn. Better than wanking!

**(Laughs) You're absolutely right! With 'Sleeping On The Job' opening the album, the thing the struck me, other than the fact it's a great up tempo feel good song, is the catchy chorus with the women backing singers that just lifted it all.**

I know. For me, that's great, but there are certain Quo fans who will find that a complete no no. They'll shut it down. It's interesting that you compared this record to

'Thirsty Work', which I produced and wrote most of. I produced 'Rock Til You Drop' as well, and to me, I think those are very good albums... well I would, I produced them. But 'Thirsty Work' wasn't that well received by the Quo audience. I think there's a certain element of the hardcore fans who just want us to do what AC/DC do, do the same stuff we were doing on 'Piledriver'. I'm not knocking AC/DC for that, they do it so well, the kind of tracks they write and the way they record them are the same as what they did on their first album.

If you or I were advising an upcoming act in this business, we would tell them to do the opposite, because you will never make it work doing the same album thirty years later. But AC/DC can do it. You would tell a young act you cannot be a heart throb in this business, be gay, get caught playing with a policeman's cock in a toilet and make it - oh, yes you can. You couldn't get away with being gay years ago, not only can you be gay if you're George, but you can get caught playing with a policeman's knob in a bog, and talk about it, and STILL be a heart throb! You would hardly advise an act to do that, but it works for him! You would probably advise a kid on the X-Factor not to say they were gay to start with, because people will be turned off, but it's not really an issue now. The business is full of things that work which you wouldn't advise. You cannot make the same album for thirty years... AC/DC can. You cannot make it big without singles and airplay in the seventies... oh, there was Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin, they did ok... so you get to what I'm doing, you'd think there's no chance a sixty year old like me who has been in a successful band for forty years is going to do anything with a solo release... hang on, maybe there is a chance! Again, the insecure little showoff in people like me makes us try it. 'Please like me, please!'

**(Laughs) I think, you mentioned Alan Lancaster having the macho rock style about him, and not getting on with 'Margarita Time' which increased you to a more mainstream profile, I have always perceived Quo, from a fan's view, as you having more of the pop sensibilities in your writing and Rick being more of the straight forward rocker. When 'Thirsty Work' came out, Rick didn't write anything on that, so I immediately assumed it was a Francis driven record, and was more pop orientated than 'Rock Til You Drop', but I really liked it, I thought there was some great stuff on there. Some of the die hards won't like it, but that's why you're playing smaller clubs, the die hards don't have to come do they?**

No, I don't think so. I'm interested to see what happens. It makes me wonder about these die hards. I think they're a bit blinkered, I'm not a guy who can understand those who say 'oh, I only like rock' or 'I only like blues' or whatever. I like so many different things. Certain bands I just don't like, but they might write one song and I'll think 'God, that's good'. Doesn't mean I'm gonna start following them around or shag them or anything, it's just that thing got to me. And that's the best thing about music. I can just hear something - for instance when I first heard Snow Patrol's 'Chasing Cars' I thought 'oh fucking hell, I should have written that!' It's three bloody chords, I can do that shit, and it's one of the most wonderful things I've ever heard. I heard it on Grey's Anatomy, and it came on over a sad bit, and I sat there booing for ages! For music to have the power to do that, it's such a joy. But the rock thing, when it's so guarded, that's not real. That doesn't mean I don't like rock, but it ends up being forced because you end up thinking 'Is it this, is it that, is it tattooed and manly?' I don't care if it's tattooed and manly or if it's a poof, is it good? You know?

For example, I've never really liked the Pet Shop Boys, there was some friction between us some years ago and I'd take the piss whenever I got chance. They brought a single out at the end of last year, and I just loved it. So I sent them a telegram saying 'I hate to admit this guys, but I absolutely love your new single. P.S. Mind you, it is a shuffle.' And it was a shuffle. And they wrote back 'Why don't you do a version then?' And all the animosity and shit went out the window! They did 'It's A Sin' - I loved it and they got so much stick for that. That's what I like... I can't say 'ooh, I don't want to like that' because the music makes me like it. I can't help it. So I don't understand how people become elitist and intellectualised about music. What are they fucking talking about? It's the same about a woman you might like. You love her because you

connect, it doesn't have to be because she looks or acts a certain way.

**Exactly, I interviewed you when 'In Search For The Fourth Chord' came out and I said that I thought the last three Quo albums, '...Chord', 'The Party Ain't Over Yet' and 'Heavy Traffic' - I loved them to bits from start to finish. I thought they were much stronger records, track for track, than the so called 'classic' albums.**

Good man! That's because you've listened to them, that's why.

**Yeah, I remember discussing this with you and you said the old albums obviously had some magic moments with the classic songs you still play today, but some of the others had sloppy playing or were real filler tracks...**

Real sloppy playing on 'Hello'!

**Exactly! But people I know immediately dismiss the notion that you might have made a decent record since the seventies, and it really winds me up, it's bollocks. And they state it like it's a fact, rather than simply their opinion, which is even more annoying.**

That's because it's one of those things people say - they hear others say it and they join in. I've heard that about so many acts, not just us. Any act that's done the rounds gets it from someone, and it's... fuck me, couldn't they come up with something original to say? And it's not true. I totally understand we need to keep the nostalgia thing intact, but we're not going to keep making 'Piledriver' and 'Hello'. I've been there, done it! I listen back to those albums and think 'shit, that's bad, oh

God, that's embarrassing, oh, that's magic though...' But those albums are not ten tracks of blinding magic! I agree with you, I think 'Heavy Traffic', 'Under The Influence', '...Fourth Chord' - they're bloody good albums. There's a good mixture of material and I have this argument with people who perceive Status Quo as being like AC/DC in that we don't vary our style much - wrong. We have ballads by Rick, he used to write all the ballads. He wasn't a rocker at all, but someone convinced him he needed to growl and sing like that. Rick's voice is a good, classic cabaret voice. Not that anyone will ever hear it. So he gets lost on that 'It has to be rock!' trip. No! Let's make the album with the material that's coming out. That's what we did in the seventies. We did a track called 'A Year' on 'Piledriver'. If we did that now, people would laugh at us. They've got this image of us. I suppose with it being showbiz, 95% is bullshit. People end up thinking the seventies were a certain way, they forget the crap... if you lived back then you had three day weeks, power was going off, people were really unhappy... but when you look back it's 'Oh, wasn't it marvellous back then?' Yeah, alright, if you say so.

**On the subject of Quo songs, you've re-worked 'Caroline' on your new album...**

(Laughs) Mmm, yes, did you like that? Cheeky isn't it!

**I did, I thought it was really cool how you did it. I was wondering, did you do that so there was something familiar to Quo fans on the record, or did you always want to re-work it?**

Well, that was how me and Bob wrote it in the first place. I spoke to my manager about doing stuff for this album, and I heard Robert Plant doing some things from his back catalogue and changing them, and I thought





oooh.... and my manager said about maybe taking one or two of the Quo ones and trying something similar. I wasn't too keen at first, they've been done and I wrote them anyway! But I was in here, the studio, like I am now down the garden, and I started going "diddy diddy diddy..." and ended up muttering "If you want to... turn me on to..." over the top and then thought 'oh shit!' So I quickly put the basic thing down to capture the feel, and did it properly the following day. When I heard it back, I smiled, because I thought it was cheeky. (Laughs) Guess what, I'm gonna open with that fucking thing. I've opened with 'Caroline' for centuries, and I can just see the smart arses saying 'He's not going to open with the same song...' Yes he is!

**(Laughs) I think it would be great, it'll set the scene for the feel of the show, but still be familiar. It shows it's not a Quo gig per se but there's enough there that if you like Quo you should enjoy it.**

I think it'll be excellent as an opener. I can't detach myself from Quo totally, because that's who I am, I wrote these things for Quo and I play guitar and sing those songs within Quo. So unless I try and go against the grain and refuse to play Quo stuff... well it's not possible. It'd be like telling Eric Clapton to not be Eric, or any other established artist not to be who they are, it's kind of silly.

**There's a bonus track on there of 'I Can See Clearly Now' - was there any reason you chose that or was it a personal favourite?**

Yeah - just as I was moving, about two or three years ago, I moved about spitting distance from my old place, where I'd been for about 34 years. We were moving into this new house and myself and the engineer were decommissioning the old studio because the new was ready to be moved into. We got a call on the Wednesday from some guys who needed a song for the Friday for a movie.

There was a film out called 'Three And Out', it was really good. The press picked up a funny angle on it, and like the PC brigade kicked in about it. It's about a guy who drives a subway train, and someone throws themselves in front of it. Then it happens again and he gets told that if three people do it, they retire you for life and give you money. So he ends up hunting around for a third person to dump in front of his train! (Laughs) He's looking for someone depressed who wants to bump themselves off.

Anyway, I was asked to do a track and we did 'I Can See Clearly Now'... very flouncy to what it is on the record. Pip Williams produced it. Anyway, they used something else instead, and when we were looking for a bonus track, we thought about that. I don't want it as part of the record itself... as a bonus track on some versions, fine, but I don't want it as part of the album. I like it, but I want to keep the album as my own material really. What we did for the movie I thought was blinding, but sadly the film went pear shaped, thanks to the PC brigade or someone getting involved. They really hammered this film and I think it was taken off after only a few days. Poor bastards, it's a good film.

**Well I'm all out of questions Francis, so I'll let you and Bob get back to your writing.**

I'm sorry, I waffle on so much!

**Don't apologise, it's great! And it makes my job easy. I can come in with four questions and I'm done! (laughs)**

(Laughs) Thanks very much!

**I really enjoyed the album, and I hope the tour goes well and I hope to see at one of them.**

That would be good, you take care!

**They've been together for over 42 years, toured the world more times than I've had hot dinners, released more albums than you can shake a stick at and they're still going strong. One of Scotland's longest serving rock bands, Nazareth are currently in the process of re-releasing their entire back catalogue – quite a feat in itself, and I recently caught up with founder member and bassist Pete Agnew to find out just what it is that keeps them going and what they have in store for us in the next 42 years!**

**So Pete, what are you up to at the moment?**

We've just finished the UK tour and we're off to Russia and the Ukraine next. We do a lot of work out in Russia. We did a long tour there last September/October for about six weeks. Then we did the Czech Republic for about 3 weeks and that was us off until we started these tour dates. Usually we schedule the UK dates for the start of the year, so we did 14 shows – there should have been another 3, but 2 at the start got cancelled (we don't know what happened there, but the promoter just disappeared). We had Bradford and Gallashiels booked in, but just couldn't find the person who booked us – disappeared off the face of the planet!

**Oh dear, there seems to be more and more of that happening recently.**

Then, we were supposed to play in Bristol, but Lee (Agnew, Pete's son and drummer) had a dodgy kebab in London the night before and couldn't play, so we had to cancel that one. We're going to play it again though, just before we head over to Germany for the start of the European dates. We've got about six weeks across there – Germany, Austria and Switzerland then into Russia and the Ukraine.

**There really is a huge rock scene over there, isn't there?**

Yes, I mean, if you go to St Petersburg and Moscow and go through the middle of town (although, in Moscow I guess it's ALL the middle – I mean, there's no Moscow High Street! Ha, ha!) but there are massive posters and billboards the size of buildings, advertising everybody you can think of and they're all there in town the same week as you. When we first went to the USSR, there was just us, that was it. We were pioneers out there. There were no posters in Moscow – there were no street lights, for god's sake! It's just like any big westernised city now. So, you can see just about anybody you'd ever care to see in Moscow – they'll all be playing there at some point. We go to other places as well now though. Us and Deep Purple, we go to the likes of Omsk and Tomsk and places like that. You're not going to be seeing Celine Dion playing there!

**Deep Purple always seem to have had a massive following over there and I know Glenn Hughes has even done stuff with their prime minister in the past, hasn't he?**

Yes, he did a gig with us over there a couple of years ago with Hughes/Turner. It was one of those four band bills that we did in Moscow and St Pete, just in those two cities. Deep Purple have been to a few different places, but I can tell you without a doubt, Nazareth have been to the most! If they've got electricity, we've played there. We've played places in Russia that Russians have never heard of! We've definitely played more cities than anyone else – even the journalists tell you that when you're there. They ask us "you're playing in – wherever – why?" and was say "because you're paying us!"

**All the albums have been re-mastered and rereleased in batches of three?**

Well, it was, but I've just done interviews for the sleeve notes for the next two – 'Expect No Mercy' and 'No Mean City' – but you're right, up to know it's been in batches of three.

**What made you decide to do that?**

It was the record company's decision. We signed up with a new label for all the back catalogue stuff, and like any of the others, when we were with Eagle for about six years and before that with Castle, they all did it. They all wanted to re-master and put all the albums out again, but they seemed to put them out willy-nilly. What's good about Salvo is that they've decided to put them out in the order that they were originally released. We get a lot of people coming onto the website saying "I've missed out on this album – can't get it anywhere", but now we can say to them watch out for it, it's coming around! Someone was looking for 'Malice in Wonderland' the other day. I thought it would have been next as that would have made the next batch of three, but it'll be within a year anyway. So, you can tell people just to keep an eye on the website and you'll see the order they come up in, so I think that was a good idea.

**There seems to be an awful lot of bonus material on all the releases – where on earth are you finding all these extra tracks from?**

I have no idea! A few of them are live tracks and 'other' studio versions of things keep turning up – things that I thought we'd dumped. I don't know how they got hold of some of it. When Billy Rankin was in the band, we did some recordings in Fish's studio. It was after we'd finished an album and it was an acoustic session of 'This Flight Tonight' and two or three other songs. I see they've cropped up on a couple of CD's. In the old days, when it was vinyl and you recorded your eight, nine, ten tracks or whatever, everybody put out singles then, so you always needed some B-sides for them because you didn't want to use two tracks off the album. You'd have an A-side and practically ANYTHING would do for a B-side. So, at the end of the sessions when the album was done, you'd say "let's do some B-sides" and you'd go in and basically just have some fun. Everybody would have a few pints and get in there and see what you came away with. What's funny about THAT is, you think that's fine, it's a jolly enough thing, we'll stick them on the back of the next couple of singles, then someone comes up to you years later and says "that's my favourite song", so I guess there's no accounting for taste! (laughs)

**But that's good that even the songs that you think are throw-away are**