

Status Quo

James Gaden interviews Francis Rossi

After the release of 'Aquostic' in 2014, Status Quo notched up their best selling album for 18 years, taking many of their classic songs and re-working them into new, unplugged gems. The quintet of Francis Rossi, Rick Parfitt, John 'Rhino' Edwards, Andrew Bown and Leon Cave were joined by a string section, accordion players and female backing singers, resulting in a musical triumph. Naturally, a sequel was announced, but the band faced a hurdle when Parfitt suffered a heart attack while on tour in Turkey. While he recovers, Fireworks called up his long term musical partner to hear about 'Aquostic II: That's A Fact!'

Before the interview began, I prepared myself as Francis does like to use all manner of funny voices and aliases when he answers the phone, trying to catch you out. This time however, he answered the phone and started speaking before I'd uttered a single word:

Yeah, I mean we had to look at it again and do another one eventually, and I think the album's really great and I'm looking forward to getting it out on the road so yeah, thanks, bye.

That was the easiest interview I've ever done!

I was sat here rehearsing it – could you tell? (laughs) I make myself laugh, I'm like that kid who entertains himself all the time. Anyway, how can I help you young man?

You can carry on calling me young man for starters, I like that.

We all do, mind you I used to think it was really patronising and annoying. Now I'm at the age where I realise there's not many people I can't call "young man"! Fucking hell.

I remember Jimmy Carr cracking a joke once where he said the only time he could be described as young now was if he died.

(Laughs) It's true innit? You're an old cunt, you're past it, but if you die when you're 52 people say "Oooh, he was ever so young". What a weird existence. Somebody sent me a picture of me from the olden days, I had a grey T-shirt on and these flared mustard coloured trousers and the way I'm holding my guitar, you can tell, there's that bravado of youth, that kind of "Look at me!" vibe. I suppose you grow up and think "Dickhead". But then I realised if you don't think that, you're a bigger dickhead. If you look back and think "Oooh, wasn't I fab?"... oh dear!

How's Rick doing anyway, after his health problems?

He's okay, he just needs to take better care of himself, but none of us expected him to drop dead in Turkey, so we had no real plan B. With him being ill, it did give the band some Dunkirk spirit, we all pulled together as a team for the album. What do you think of it?

I love it. I was a big fan of the first one and this works just as well for me.

Oh good. I've never seen John so concerned about an album. You have that period making it where it's all "Yep, yep, yep, it's great" and then you have a playback of the full thing and you go "Yep, lovely", you play it for the record company and they're knocked out by it... it's like snakes and

ladders, you get to the top of a ladder and just hope you aren't going to come crashing down. Next stage is the pluggers, they love it, then people like yourself, you guys tell us you love it... but I don't think John's ever been so involved in an album like he was on this, where his bum's going "parp" as we get closer to releasing it. Following the first one, I think this one is a bit meatier. The last one had more known hits on it, but we've used a load of those up now. Our producer Mike Paxman and I went through so many fucking songs, maybe we made some mistakes and should've gone with ones that were mooted and we didn't include, but overall, we like the album. However, it doesn't matter if we love it, we can love it to death and if the people don't like it and don't buy it, it's a sack of shit. Have you noticed when people talk about great album covers? It's never an album that stiffed, it's always some huge album! The artwork becomes synonymous with the music that people loved.

The cover for this is good, it fits the album well.

I really like the artwork for this new one, I'm really happy with that. You can tell by my voice I'm enthused, but I must admit it's difficult to be objective so soon after finishing a record.

I think the material is a great mix, you have some really well known tracks like 'Roll Over Lay Down' and 'In The Army Now', with some much lesser known songs like 'That's A Fact', which I must admit I'd kind of forgotten.

We found that last time, when we put 'And It's Better Now' on there and people said to us "I've never heard that before." I realised we have ardent Quo fans who know every song from every album, but then there are other fans more on the periphery who know us from our singles, just like I know bands from their singles, I've not gone out and bought every single record. So when I'm super enthused I wonder if we can expand into that a bit more. I like the idea of building the acoustic stuff over the next few years. Once we hit on that arrangement for 'Roll Over Lay Down', there was something joyous about it. It's tremendous. You mentioned 'In The Army Now', that's my favourite. We tried it for the last album and couldn't make it work and we tried it again and it wasn't happening. Then one day after rehearsals Mike picked up a guitar and went "Ooh, hang on" and it clicked, we got John round and pretty much finished it within the hour. I love the creativity these acoustic albums bring.

We're not precious about the songs either, we've got three new ones, two of Andrew's and one of mine, and I'm a little disappointed in mine, 'Is Someone Rocking Your Heart'. The demo was electric and I thought it

was really good, now we've done it acoustically I'm thinking "Yeah, it's okay..." I really like Andrew's two though. I've always liked his writing, it can be a bit left field. He wrote 'Rock Till You Drop' for us and I loved that. I just wonder if people are noticing the new ones. Then we have other people saying "Oh, well if you do a third album it could all be originals" and I'm thinking "Whoa, hang on, hang on!" There's still plenty of others I'd like to try, particularly 'Twenty Wild Horses'. We also looked at 'Roll The Dice' and I really would like to try 'Sherrie Don't Fail Me Now'.

'Sherrie...' would be great, but speaking of that, it's great to see a track from 'Thirsty Work' on here, 'Lover Of The Human Race'. It works great and 'Thirsty Work' is a very underrated album in my book.

Andrew and I work together by bringing each other bits of songs for the others to finish off. I took that to him and I'd sung "We need something more..." to indicate we needed something else there. But he took it as the lyric and built the entire chorus from it and suddenly we had the song. That was one where I thought we were making a social statement about the world, but it was pointed out to me people don't really want that from Quo, and even if they did, they're probably not aware they've heard it. That track... we laid it down and you have ups and downs making an album, and I thought "There's something wrong with that"... something I just couldn't place. And that's part of the creative joy of this. I came back to it, I forget now what it was I tweaked, but once I did – "Oh, there it is!" It suddenly seemed right.

I'll be buying the deluxe version when that's released, because you have extra songs, one of which is 'Little Dreamer' from 'Perfect Remedy'. It wasn't one of Quo's more popular albums, but I always really liked that song.

Oh really? It was Mike who suggested that. We did that and I thought I'd lost it on the verse. We had to make some adjustments, we did that and we recorded 'Lies' as well. 'Lies' came out great, I only had to alter the vocal in the verse. Sometimes you can overthink the arrangements. We did 'Living On An Island' and 'For You' too because Rick wanted to do those. I like that you asked me about that, I've been doing promo for shows and getting a bit fed up with questions like "So what can we expect from you when you play here?" I'll say things like we're going to do Pink Floyd stuff, we're fed up doing Quo songs. "Are you really?" No you fucking idiot, of course we're not! Or I'll get asked "Are you looking forward to coming to so-and-so?" and I'll say not really, why should I be, are those people more important than any other people we're playing in front of? "Are you really looking forward to Glastonbury?" No, it's just a gig, I hope it goes well, I hope it's the best ever, but it might not be – and either way I'll be playing somewhere else the next night. I think I'm pissing people off by being too open!

Due to the success of the previous 'Aquostic' record, this one gets a standard CD release, a deluxe 2CD, and a limited

edition double vinyl release. Is that nice to see a proper vinyl release for one of your albums again?

I'm supposed to say yes here aren't I? I'll be honest – do I give a fuck? No. People wheel out "Oh, it's better on vinyl." It's not a better song on vinyl, it's the same song! If you say there's a better nostalgic sound and you like having this twelve inch sleeve, fine, but it doesn't make the music any better. It's nice that the audience can get it on vinyl, if that's their preference.

Prior to any acoustic touring, you do have one 'Aquostic' show coming up in Hyde Park.

Parp...not that it's bothering me! Yeah, we'd played some shows in Spain, I think we were doing 'What You're Proposing' and I realised I needed to play the different arrangement to the one I'm used to, or we'll all get lost. You've got to be careful and think about it, that bothers me but once we've rehearsed it all I'll feel better.



"The thrill of that success, and with the next one you want to sell more, reach more people. It's never satisfied, it's probably why so many musicians become drug addicts, there's an addictive nature to it. It's the biggest drug I've ever known and the one that still needs to be fed."

Francis Rossi of Status Quo

There's nerves there for sure. Similarly, I don't mind telling people it's expensive to tour the acoustic show, but people don't really talk about that in promo. You need to make a lot of dosh to make it work. People don't like it when I talk about that side. I really want to do the acoustic stuff, but if it doesn't make money to make it worthwhile, you can only finance it for a certain period before it stops making sense.

Last time we spoke, you said you weren't sure how much longer Quo could continue doing the electric tours because of how tiring it was, and since then you've announced the 'Last Nights Of The Electrics' tour. Does it feel a bit more real now you've come out and set a date to finish the big electric tours?

Yes, I was talking with the wife this morning and I said "Oops". (laughs) It's duel-edged really. On the one hand my income will drop won't it?

People all think I've got trillions in the bank but it's not quite that much. But I do get really tired from those shows. My wife said "Well what will you do?" and there's lots I'd like to do, I might write, I might record with someone, but whatever it is, when I announce it, I've made a commitment. If I commit to more acoustic shows, do another album, do whatever, once I've committed to it, I need to see it through. At the moment, next year we're doing the acoustic stuff. I really want to do that, that's interesting to me, it's like when we started out, I've got that feeling again of "We can make this go somewhere". On the other hand, I think "Yeah, but I'm 67, where are you going with it, by the time we're out there I'll be 68". I look in the mirror and I think "Whoa, who's been fucking with my face? They've made a real mess under my neck here, what the fuck happened?" (laughs) But that's the ying and the yang of it, the worrying, and pushing forward thinking "this is great!"

That's why you're driven, imagine how crap your product would be if you thought "Ah, that'll do" and weren't concerned anymore how it was received.

That's a good point, and I think that's what had happened with the electric side, I said when we did 'Quid Pro Quo' we were kind of full up doing that sort of music. It was time for something else I think. It was like when Angus Young was asked what he said to people when they said AC/DC had made the same album fourteen times, and Angus replied "Fuck off – it's fifteen times!" (laughs) We'll get to the end of the year first – like with what happened to Rick, you don't know what's down the road. This album could be the biggest album we've ever done. Or it could be the biggest stiff we've ever had. You don't know until it's out and that's part of the thrill, that risk, that gamble.

You worried about the first 'Aquostic' but that did really well, at least you have the knowledge this time that people are receptive to the idea.

Yes, I take that point but you know what I'm like, now I want to do better than last time. Wouldn't it be nice to sell more than last time? I know it sounds like that comes purely from a monetary point of view, but it isn't, it's that intangible... I was telling my daughter... we were in Heathrow and we'd check the singles, 'What You're Proposing' had just come out and it was about 11am and we'd done 47,000 copies that morning. Knowing that, and knowing it was being played all over Europe, people were buying it, that was the thrill. The monetary thing comes later, and it's never as much as you think it'll be, but it means you don't have to worry about bills and whatever. The thrill of that success, and with the next one you want to sell more, reach more people. It's never satisfied, it's probably why so many musicians become drug addicts, there's an addictive nature to it. It's the biggest drug I've ever known and the one that still needs to be fed. I've told you before I go on stage I'll think "Oh, I don't wanna go on, don't make me go on" and then I'll come off and I really enjoyed myself. It happens the same way every night. I get on my own tits! (laughs)