

DON'T CHANGE THE STATUS QUO....

Some bands have a long and illustrious career. Some bands have stood the test of time. Some bands have had a hatfull of hit singles. Some bands carved their own niche in rock history with their own unmistakable sound. Some bands are legends. Status Quo are all of the above. Striding purposefully into their 40th Anniversary (how many other bands can you name who did that?) and releasing their 33rd album, the Quo also managed to get themselves in the record books as the act with more hit singles in UK chart history than anybody else, thanks to the recent success of 'The Party Ain't Over Yet', the title track from their excellent new album. How do they feel about all of that? JAMES GADEN telephoned RICK PARFITT to find out.

The first thing on the agenda when Rick answered the phone was to congratulate him on a 40th Anniversary. It puts things into perspective when the band have been around thirteen years longer than I've been alive! Rick is exactly as I expected - down to earth and cool about everything, simply replying with "Thanks. Not bad going is it?" I'll say, so I got him to elaborate.

"Well, it's been fantastic really," he tells me. "I mean, what more can I say? It's been, to quote a cliché, a rollercoaster. There's been a lot of good times, there's been a lot of bad times you know? But I think the good times have probably outweighed the bad and it's gone past really quickly actually. I haven't thought about it, really and truly. For Francis and me, it's another year, it's just got 40 attached to it. I suppose it's a landmark, a milestone or whatever it's called, but it's just another year and we're out here touring."

At the time of the call Rick was in Germany for some shows and making preparations for the next leg of the new tour to promote the brand new album which, in my view, is excellent. I tell him what I think.

"Yeah, I'm very happy with it. I know I'm bound to say that but I am, otherwise it wouldn't be out there. I think the content is a little more commercial than the last one and, if you like a little more poppy. I think it's colourful and well recorded. We're very happy with it and we think it's very up to date. I don't think we're stuck in the 70's, the 80's or even the 90's, I think we're up there, we're up to speed with it now. A couple of the tracks have gone into the set now which is good. Everything is going swimmingly well. It's alarming!"

I explained that I'd had the promo several weeks before it was released, and in all honesty, after reviewing the eleven reissues a couple of issues back, I wasn't expecting anything new. But 'The Party Ain't Over Yet' took me by surprise with how new and fresh it sounded. I point out some tracks are typical Quo but they are nicely interspersed with some refreshingly different sounding material.

"Well do you know what? That's exactly what I love to hear," Rick replies. "That was the aim. In the past if we do, as you just said, more typical Quo, people go 'Oh, same old thing from Quo.' And normally, when we release something a little different like this, a lot of people turn around and say 'Look, why don't you stick to what you do best?' We can't win. So we let go and the material on this album is what we wanted to do, it's what pleases us so we're happy with it. You kind of hope your fans will be, and when you hear things back from people like yourself, it's great. That is

mission accomplished for me."

I explain to Rick that one of my favourites on the album is 'The Bubble', a song more likely to come from ZZ Top than it is Status Quo. I ask about the origin of it's curious title. Rick takes time out from eating his biscuit ("Rock and roll!" he laughs) to answer.

"When we're on the road we call it being in the bubble. The reason is once you get onboard the tour bus and you get out on the road you're detached from the rest of the world. All you see is tour bus, stage, dressing room, hotel, tour bus, stage, dressing room, hotel. You don't know what day it is, half the time you don't know what time it is - you don't need to because you've got people round you prompting you when to go on... any day could be a Saturday, any day could be a Wednesday, it doesn't matter on the road. You are in 'the bubble'. You just glide along and do the tour. The world outside is a different place and you're in the bubble - that's your place of work. It's an anecdotal song about touring."

I mention the vibe of the song was very different and it sits really nicely in the middle of the album. Rick agrees.

"Yeah, it kind of swingingly rocks along doesn't it? Or something like that. I don't know how to put it but it's an enjoyable track. In fact I'm going to listen to it in a minute. You've got me going now!"

Now I'm on a roll, it's time to confess to Rick that I've always liked his voice best in the Quo, and I was really pleased he got to sing quite a bit on the new CD. Shameless brown-nosing it may be, but at least I'm man enough to admit it.

"I really like you, you know that?" Rick laughs. "I've done quite well on this album because I gave up smoking pretty much for the duration of the recording. I've started again now but when I gave up my voice did improve I have to say. And a couple of other people, like the producer said my voice sounded much better. So I should really kick right back on the fags again, but it's difficult. I thought I sang good on the album and I'm quite happy with my work."

One of my favourite songs Rick provides the vocals for is 'This Is Me', an acoustic number which he also wrote. I get the feeling it's very autobiographical and I ask him if I'm right.

"Well it was a bit of a run in with the papers a couple of months ago now. Just one of those things, I won't go into detail. It's just a song saying to the fans that I'm only human and these kinds of things happen sometimes, but it's rock and roll. The song basically tells the story about a run in with the tabloids."

The other major factor in my enjoyment of the new album is there isn't a single track I didn't like or would choose to skip. Being a Quo fan obvious-

ly made me slightly biased, but I played it to other people and got the same reaction. Rick knows where I'm coming from.

"You know what, if I hear one track off an album and I like it, I'll buy the album. And on so many occasions, and I'm naming no names, but on so many occasions you get the album and you think fuck, there's nothing else on here I like! It really brings you down. So I think, hopefully, there is something for everybody on this album."

"And I'll tell you what happened with me," he continues. "When you finish an album you go home and play it and you don't really like it. It's like cooking a Sunday roast, or dinner for a lot of people. You've been stood over it for hours doing it and then you don't want to eat it. It's the same when you get the album home. You think fuck, I don't wanna play it! So I let it fester for a few weeks and then I put it on and I've been playing it on and off here and there for the last couple of months and I've really grown to like it now. I think we've done a good job, but you have to stand back from it for a while because you've been so close to it for however many months you recorded it. You really need to leave it alone for a few weeks and then have another listen. But I enjoy it now."

The new albums predecessor, 'Heavy Traffic', was championed as well, so I asked Rick if they went about recording this one the same way - for instance 'Heavy Traffic' was recorded pretty much live in the studio. Did that apply to 'The Party Ain't Over Yet'?

"Yeah, pretty much, all in the same room," Rick confirms. "We played it like we do as a band. It's the only way for us - you can't put this down, then put that down. You gotta get in there and play it as one. It might take longer that way because you're going to struggle to get that one take where everybody has played good on, but if you get four out of five, then you can repair a mistake or whatever instead of redoing the track. But the nucleus of it is the band playing together. I think that's where the magic occurs."

That comment leads me to point out that the entire band has contributed greatly to the writing duties on this CD.

"Of course. The whole thing appears that Francis and I front the band, which we do, in terms of promotion and all that, but when it comes to writing, recording, arranging and all that - it's five people. We're all in there together, 20% each. When we record or play live we are just one bunch of guys. In the public eye it's Francis and I, but it's a five way split."

One name I did recognise is Bob Young, who back in the seventies wrote some of the classic Quo material with Francis Rossi.

"Francis has started to write with Bob again," Rick states. "I suppose that's a good thing but time will tell. Whether they can conjure up the magic of their work in the 70's, we shall see. He won't be as close as he was with us all those years ago, where he used to come and play onstage with us. That won't happen again but it's good to have him writing again."

I mention that it's probably necessary to have an outsider there to inject something into the band when you're on your 33rd album - it can't be easy keeping things fresh?

"It is really, in some ways," agrees Rick. "But in my book, there's always a song to be written. I have an analogy about it whereby there's a room in front of you with the door open and there is a song hanging in there but it's all in bits. All you've gotta do is be in the right mood to go into that room and assemble the pieces and put them together a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. But it's all there waiting for you. If you are a musician, there is a song to be written all the time. It's just a case of whether you want to go



into the room. Once the song is written, once you've put it all together, you shut the door on it. As soon as that shuts, another opens and there's another song waiting to be written. That's how I look upon it. That's what I did on this album anyway, that's how I approached it. It may sound a bit double dutch, but that's my method."

As I prepared for the interview, I received a press release about a new DVD coming out to act as a companion to the album and give the viewer an insight into the 40 years the Quo have racked up. I ask Rick what to expect.

"It's a definitive DVD coming out. I've seen it and it's fucking amazing I have to say. It's probably the best product I've seen or heard from the band. It really is fantastic with some footage that even I haven't seen - God knows where they got it from. But it's just fantastic. I've seen it two or three times now and it puts a smile on your face all the way through. There's a lot of humour going on and a lot of live stuff... it's really fantastic and although I say so myself, you must get that. I guarantee you, if you like Quo, you'll love this."

Which brings me to the band's latest venture onto the small screen. This interview took place on the afternoon before they appeared in 'Coronation Street' in a highly amusing storyline, so I questioned him about how that happened.

"Well, Bruce Jones, who plays Les Battersby, is a big fan of ours in real life, like his character. We've seen him at lots of gigs. We've often seen him in the dressing room and just kind of ambled over and said stuff like 'Wouldn't it be great if we could just walk across the shot, or be extras or whatever', just kind of jokingly really. Then we got phone call about three or four months ago saying they'd like to write us into the script if we were ok with it. So we just said yeah, great. We didn't think it would be quite as involved as it is. The actual storyline revolves around an incident that happened twenty years ago involving Quo and Les Battersby. It runs just about up to Christmas I think. It's a tongue in cheek story, as a lot of Corrie is, and you've gotta be prepared to have the piss taken out of you a little bit. It's kind of a caricature almost, but it's very warm, very friendly and amusing."

It was exactly that and very well done. Some of the jokes were superb - such as Les crashing into the back of the tour van, injuring yet another member of the Quo and Rossi shouting "It's him again! Someone's paying you. It's Led Zeppelin isn't it!" and Rick having his hair in curlers before taking them out and remarking "It's so light and fluffy - let's try it out!" and doing some mock headbanging.

I tell Rick that I was happy to be granted this interview because even though just about every-

body on the planet knows who Status Quo are, both he and Francis Rossi come across as very amiable, down to earth blokes.

"Well, that's the way we are, we can't be any different. Our upbringing was the same, we're just normal blokes who have happened to come together in '65 and the fusion happened. In life you're lucky if you find a wife, a partner or something that is agreeable to you and can help move your life on. We were lucky to meet I suppose, and here we are forty years on. A meeting I suppose that was meant to be."

Which brings me to the point where I ask him about the solo album he was supposed to have made back in the eighties. I ask what happened and why a solo album was on the cards.

"We had a bit of a bust up, drug fuelled mainly. We were taking loads of coke and everybody went off in different directions and it was all very weird. It spoiled the humour between Francis and me and it wasn't a good period at all. I went off and did a solo album called 'Recorded Delivery' and it was never released. Francis did one too around the same time and that was never released either. Then we got a call from the record company saying we had to do another album. We said well, we haven't got a band anymore because Alan Lancaster had gone, John Corgan had drifted off.... So we put a new band together, and the line up was in fact, the drums and bass were Geoff Rich and John 'Rhino' Edwards, who played on my solo album. I said to Francis that they were good guys, draft 'em in and we'll do an album. We came up with 'In The Army Now' and bang, it started all over again."

"We started again as a band from that point and it's taken many years but we're at a point where we are really up and running. The band, the way it's working and playing at the moment is just phenomenal. It sounds a bit big headed, it's not meant to be, but we're playing so well it's a real pleasure to do it."

I have to agree. I tell him I saw the band on the last tour and it was relentless fun boogie rock, with the group as into it as the audience.

"Well if you see us on this tour you'll see it even more because this time we've got a lot of the oldies in, stuff from 'Heavy Traffic' and some songs from the new album. The set is expanding but it's getting very difficult because you end up putting stuff in, but what the fuck do you take out? We're up there for about 2 hours now and it's getting a bit much at our age! But we're rolling with it and it's great fun to do."

So with that in mind, I thank Rick and leave him alone to carry on doing what he does best - rocking all over the world.