

Status Quo

Status Quo are a British institution, known for a huge collection of good time boogie rock singles and successful albums. Their latest project is more multimedia based – the brand new album 'Bula Quo' is in fact the soundtrack for their very first feature length film of the same name. The entertaining action-comedy is set in Fiji where Status Quo are filming a promo video and performing some shows. While there, Rick Parfitt and Francis Rossi stumble across an illegal game of Russian Roulette. They have to stay one step ahead of the villains in order to present the evidence to the police. Co-starring Craig Fairbrass and Jon Lovitz, the film features plenty of chases, gags and great music, along with Rossi and Parfitt's trademark humour. James Gaden got in touch with Francis to discuss the project.

Quo's charismatic lead guitarist is delighted when I tell him how much I enjoyed the new record.

"Do you really? I'm pleased about that," he replies. "We were just talking about it actually, apparently our message board has been shut down because some fans were outraged by the track 'Bula Quo'. I think it was only about 150 or 200 people. All through our career people have been saying 'Why don't you do something a bit different?' and as soon as we do something slightly out of the box they go fucking mad."

This sort of knee-jerk hysteria seems a little over the top, considering the album is a soundtrack for a film set in Fiji, so having a couple of tracks with a Caribbean or reggae vibe should not be wholly unexpected. But a couple of tracks is all it is – the rest of the album us good old fashioned rock and roll, Quo style.

"It's weird," Francis says. "You know that normally when an album comes out, I tend to do twenty or thirty tracks and we use about five or six of them. But because we were in the movie, I could not get into that vibe. As we were doing a film, I didn't give a fuck what the music was going to be. Just before we went I started the track 'Looking Out For Caroline' and that really inspired me. When I got there I heard Rick's 'GoGoGo' and that's when I got into it as a soundtrack. Now we've done the album, I think 'Bula Quo' is excellent, I think 'Looking Out For Caroline' is excellent, 'GoGoGo' is really good, 'All That Money' is good... We started to laugh in the end, the amount of songs that were about people running away from a gun was fucking hilarious! I just spoke to a lady and we didn't realise some of the journalists have seen the film. We're doing the promo and she said 'Well I quite liked it,' and I was shocked she'd seen it. I expected it to be slagged. You know about our career - we'll look back and think 'That was a bloody good move' and other things will be a howling mistake. You never know until you've done them. I could talk to you next year and you'll say 'What a class move!' or it could be 'Well, you shouldn't have fucking done that should you?' You never really know! That's what I'm excited about, because I haven't seen the finished

thing. The movie was designed for a PG audience. My criticism, having done it, if we do another, Rick and I could do it more naturally. There's a line where I say 'They've stolen our equipment!' I wouldn't say that, I'd say 'They've only bloody nicked our gear!' It's very strange to be almost 64 and thinking about maybe doing a second movie and doing it better."

The obvious question to ask next is how did the film come about?

"When we did *Coronation Street*, they gave us a stunt coordinator which we thought was funny, he was there to teach us how to fight onscreen. He said 'I'd like to do a movie with you guys,' and we were saying 'Yeah, sure... silly arse.' A couple of year ago, we got a script with us in Bangkok, it had us being a bit too serious and macho, with guns and killing people. It went away, problems with budgets and so on... then it came up again last January. Our manager called us, said we had a brand new script set in Fiji, so we just went and did the thing. Initially, we never thought it would happen, when it did it was 'Oh no, we said we would, now we actually have to go and do it!' When *Corrie* came up, I thought 'Oh no, might be embarrassing... but really good for the band.' People think it's just music, it's not, it's wherever this takes us to. This came up, we went and did it – I never thought it would get this far!"

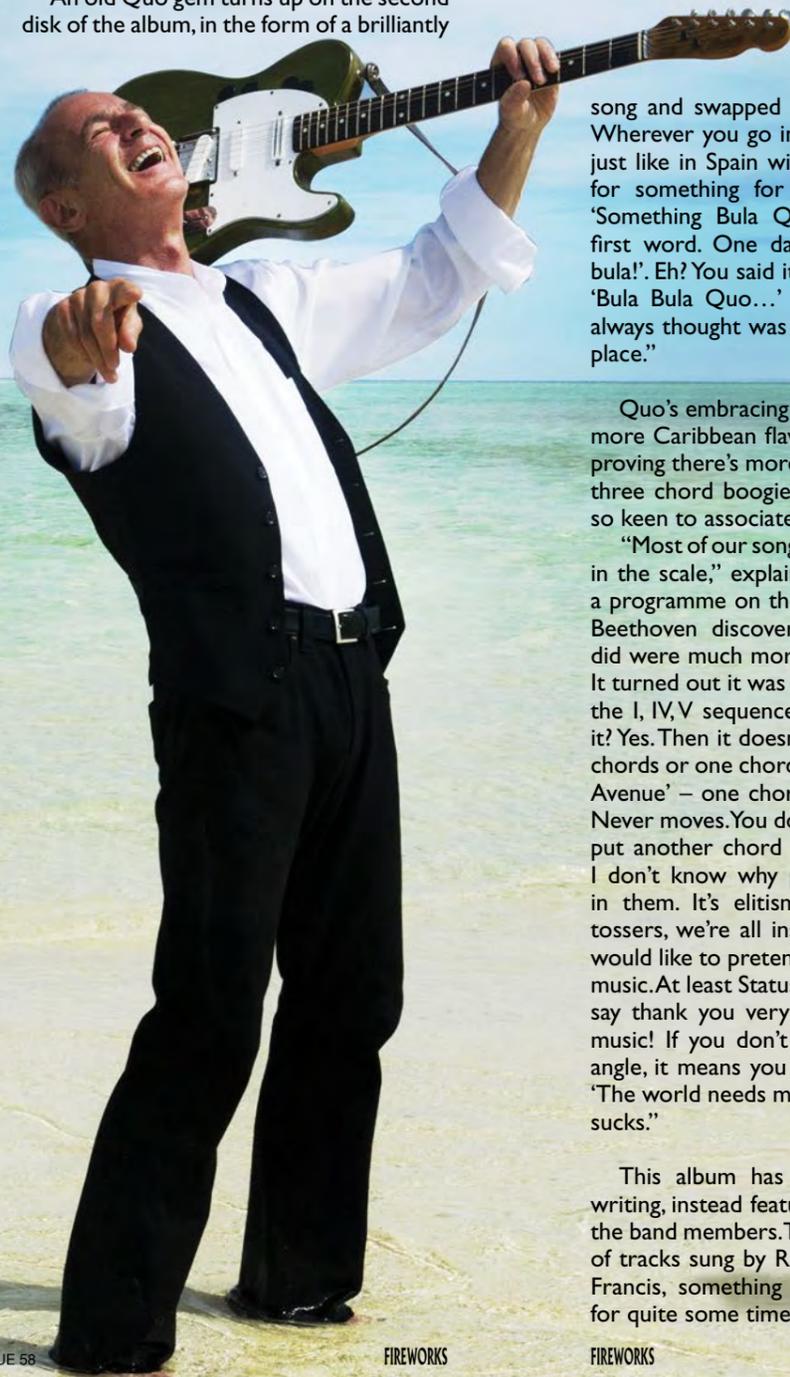
I observe that Quo's long serving bassist John 'Rhino' Edwards seems to be heavily involved in this record.

"Yeah, he had the reggae song 'Fiji Time' and 'The Gun Song,'" explains Francis. "I think he designed that for Rick, but we thought 'Why not let John sing one?' We call him the Singing Kettle, he's got a really high voice, we've used him for harmony work because you get that whistling kettle voice on the top and it sounds quite good. Luckily, it worked, I don't think Rick or I could have sung that one the way it's supposed to be. Five years ago I probably wouldn't have entertained giving it over to someone else, but now it seems like a good idea. Matthew (Letley) had 'Running Inside My Head' which was great, I really enjoyed working on that. I was kind of dismissive about the music at first but with all these

songs, it just came together. I enjoyed doing the film and I like the album. You can't blame us for doing this at 64. So if people don't like it, well, I couldn't give a shit!

"If you don't like it, I appreciate your view and understand," he continues. "You don't have to be so vociferous about it though, if you don't like it, fuck off and leave us alone. If those detractors were sat in front of me now, most of them wouldn't have the nerve to say it to my face, everyone can be anonymous on the internet. Some years ago, when our site started, I was told to go and have a look. I found a discussion about 'Who is the biggest c*nt, Francis Rossi or Mick Hucknall?' What the fuck is that? I never went on again. Ridiculous. Aside from being hurtful, it's just an opinion. If you like Mick Hucknall, you will think I'm a c*nt. If you like me, Mick will be a c*nt. I don't look at that shit anymore."

An old Quo gem turns up on the second disk of the album, in the form of a brilliantly



reworked 'Living On An Island'. I'm curious as to whether any other Quo songs were looked at.

"We thought about lots of them, and if we do a second film we're already thinking about the style of music and if anything can be reworked," Francis confirms. "However 'Living On An Island' lent itself so perfectly, it had to be done. 'Frozen Hero' was originally called 'Care Factor Zero', because that was the name of the first script we were sent. I thought it was a stupid expression, but I think it was the writer's hip way of saying 'Who gives a fuck?' I think they should have called it 'Who gives a fuck?' because it gets to the point! I did the song but changed the lyric to 'Frozen Hero' and put it on the last record, so it's odd that it actually ended up in the movie! The same thing happened with 'Bula Quo'. I had that ready for 'Quid Pro Quo' and that's what I was trying to call it, but

it wasn't quite right. In Fiji, I heard that jungle drum beat, and I put it into this song and swapped the verse and chorus. Wherever you go in Fiji, people say 'Bula!' just like in Spain with 'Ola!' I was looking for something for that phrase... I had 'Something Bula Quo', just missing that first word. One day someone said 'Bula bula!'. Eh? You said it twice! Suddenly I had 'Bula Bula Quo...' and finished a song I always thought was quite good in the first place."

Quo's embracing of a reggae theme and more Caribbean flavours seems effortless, proving there's more to them than just the three chord boogie that detractors seem so keen to associate them with.

"Most of our songs use a I, IV, V sequence in the scale," explains Francis. "There was a programme on the history of music and Beethoven discovered certain pieces he did were much more popular than others. It turned out it was the pieces that utilised the I, IV, V sequence. Basically, do you like it? Yes. Then it doesn't matter if it has four chords or one chord. Eddy Grant's 'Electric Avenue' – one chord all the way through. Never moves. You don't say 'Aw, if only he'd put another chord in I'd have loved that.' I don't know why people have snobbery in them. It's elitism – us musicians are tossers, we're all insecure show offs who would like to pretend the world needs our music. At least Status Quo are honest – we say thank you very much for buying our music! If you don't come at it from that angle, it means you have the attitude that 'The world needs my music!' Which I think sucks."

This album has a lot less of Rossi's writing, instead featuring a spread through the band members. There is a good balance of tracks sung by Rick and tracks sung by Francis, something that hasn't happened for quite some time.

"I think Rick and I finally appreciate each other since finishing the 'Frantic Four' tour," Francis confides. "I must confess, I found that tour very difficult, particularly with John Coghlan slowing down as the set went on. I would watch Rick's hand and would use that to keep time because I knew he wouldn't slow down. I really appreciated how good he is, we have this closeness and respect for each other that wasn't there before. If it's what he and I want, that's what will happen. I don't know why it's taken this fucking long to figure that out!"

Regarding the current line up, I ask Francis if it's true that Matt Letley is vacating the drum stool.

"Yes, he actually left before Christmas but he stayed on to finish commitments. He has a problem with the volume of the band, mainly the bottom end. It makes him angry and stuff, we've tried all sorts of things. If I'm honest, I think if he turned his monitors in his ears up a bit he wouldn't notice, but he seems to be trying to protect his ears for another life I don't know about. I've said to him 'What are you saving them for Matt, old age?' He's a fantastic drummer and he

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has certain issues with his elbows, it happened to him a few nights after a British tour. He asked to speak to Rick and I the next morning and said that he has to leave. It's a bit of a pisser... but it might be good too. Last time we had a change in the band, Matt came in and it made Rick, John, Andrew and I all pull our socks up a bit."

I ask if Matt has a natural successor and the reply is immediate.

"Yes, Leon Cave, who toured with my solo band. He's very good and he's got a voice should we need to use it, which could be a bonus. He's a very upbeat person, very happy. Matt was tired and worn out, he needed to move and we need to move on – and we will."

Leon will clearly be present for the upcoming 'Bula Quo' tour with 10CC.

"Yeah! I'm looking forward to that. It worked really well with Roy Wood and Kim Wilde. Last year it was trickier and not so good. We've done shows with 10CC before, stately homes and outdoor gigs. Years ago,

these two bands would never have played together, nor would the fans come to see both of them in the same room. Now, it's a really good ticket. Everyone knows 10CC, everyone knows a bit of Quo. It's difficult to get people to come to shows because of money and the industry isn't as magical as it once was. I think it'll be a very good evening from that point of view – a shitload of friggng hits. They're fucking good, that band – I'll nobble them as best I can!"

I jokingly let Francis know that I'll look out for him and Rick in *The Expendables 3*, now they have reinvented themselves as big screen action stars.

"Thanks!" he laughs. "It's interesting, we were up at 5:00am, on set by 7:30am and finished at 6:30pm. We were working hard, but I realised we thrive on that. Quo is so important to the five members of the band, everything else is irrelevant. I loved the experience and would like to do another. However, if they give me another film, I'll shit myself!"

