

Status Quo

One of Britain's most enduring live bands, Status Quo, led by Francis Rossi and Rick Parfitt, continue to fill venues and sell records with their timeless brand of rock. Last year saw them tour with the current line up to promote their first feature film 'Bula Quo' and the accompanying album, as well as reuniting with original members Alan Lancaster and John Coghlan to perform songs from the 'Frantic Four' era, something many thought they would never see again. The 'Frantic Four' line up will play six more UK dates in March and April before calling it a day, so James Gaden got in touch with Rick Parfitt to hear about how it all came together.

Initially, I interviewed Alan and John when the 'Live At The BBC' Boxset came out (Fireworks #43) and Alan didn't think there was much chance of you guys getting back together.

Alan was right, we never intended to go out again. The thought of it was completely unreal, with the arguments we'd had over the years, the disagreements, ending up in court over money and stuff... it was a disastrous situation. There came a time when the lawyers sorted things out where Alan was happy, Francis was happy, I was happy. Shortly after, a funny thing happened, Alan was talking to our manager, Simon Porter and Francis just happened to be in the room. Alan asked if he could say hello, the two of them had a chat and it was really nice after all those years and bitterness. We went to Australia to do a tour and of course Alan lives there. He came to see us and we had a good old chat and it was lovely to see him again - it was all smiles and nice.

We were having a documentary made, which would eventually become the movie 'Hello Quo', the Alan Parker film. John Coghlan came along and we all met at Shepperton studios. The idea was we would have a jam, mess about and just see what happened for the sake of this movie. So we all had a cuddle outside and it was very emotional. For me personally, I always liked Alan and always got on with him, we had a lot of laughs together. It was a very nice experience to all be together again. We started playing... and it was fucking awful. I can't tell you how bad it was! (laughs) We hadn't been in a room for something like 37 years together. Anyway, the film was made and a while after we started chatting again and talked about maybe trying some shows.

Everybody agreed to it so we went into rehearsals at Shepperton. Consequently, after two or three days of rehearsals, Francis and I talked to each other and thought "This is never going to work". We started rehearsing in earnest and it wasn't together, it sounded terrible. John, bless his heart, had been playing, but only playing in pubs and Alan had hardly played at all. The energy Quo requires is quite high. We started playing stuff like 'Juniors Wailing', 'Roadhouse Blues', stuff prior to 1976 because we didn't want to do 'Rocking All Over The World', 'Whatever You Want' and 'Caroline'. We wanted the old stuff. It started off badly and it slowed down,

we had to say to John, "Come on!" There's so much difference to playing a pub gig and doing a full blown, up to speed Quo show. It's got to have the energy, it's got to have balls.

The rehearsals were a bit of a disaster. We listened to the old tracks, re-learned the parts, used the live album recorded in Glasgow about 200 years ago as the template for the set. Slowly, in the second week, things started to come together and it started to quite turn me on! It was heavy - I'd actually forgotten how heavy Quo was. The current Quo is almost 'Quo-lite' if you like. It can still kick arse, but there's something about that combination of Rossi, Parfitt, Lancaster and Coghlan that makes it heavy. I can't quite

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put my finger on it. That started to appear in the second week and I started feeling good about it. We were still rusty for that first show. John wasn't sure of the endings, Alan is not in the best of health and he couldn't hold on to his plectrum. He's not got a lot of strength in his hands now, so there were a few disasters. For Francis and I, it's water of a duck's back to us. We're up to speed and used to playing. That first show, we had to keep saying to John, "Come on, for fuck's sake, keep going!", and Alan's dropping his plectrum... but the fans, the reaction - that first show, and particularly the Hammersmith show, I'm not kidding, people were fainting, people were crying, the reaction was just phenomenal, real goose bump stuff.

I really enjoyed it and after two or three shows it kind of settled down. We were rough around the edges, but Quo always was, so to me it felt good. I had a fantastic time and absolutely loved it. So did the audiences.

Originally, those dates were the final time for the Frantic Four, but we have six new ones here. I assume there will be some tweaks to the set?

Yes, we're discussing what to do, it'll be more like it was way back when. We're going to put some little anecdotes in there, some titbits we used to like, almost jam on-stage. Sometimes nobody would quite know what was coming and we'd just kind of follow one another. That's where the magic happened I think. We're going to do that, loosen it up a bit. I don't want to rehearse it too much, just see what happens. I think it will be slicker this time, more relaxed - not in terms of energy, but a cooler vibe this time. I'm really looking forward to it.

Is the set list a complete democracy or does one of you take the lead to shape it?

Not really - like I say, we used the original live album as our template and in rehearsals, when things went wrong, everybody pitched in with how to get around it. We'd just stand there and work it out, try different endings. The trouble, when you get older like we are, is fucking remembering it! (laughs) It's one thing rehearsing it, you get out there and I swear to you, you think "Hang on, what bit... where...?" You think everyone else has gone wrong and then you realise it's you! Everybody pitches in to how the set will run, it's not down to me or Francis or any one person. I think we got it right on the last tour, and I think it'll be even better this time. I think it'll be good fun - and of course it will be the final time. It was so successful last time, we felt we must take it to Europe and let them have chance to see it. It's only fair, because way back when we were so big in Germany, Holland, France... we want to let them have chance to see it one last time, but then that will be it.

Did the four of you talk about doing a studio record, or was it always just going to be live gigs?

It has been talked about, but it isn't going to happen. The main reason is I don't think the old band would lend itself to what Francis and I write these days. I don't think it would sound right somehow. Doing new songs... that would result in pressure to tour the new album and we don't want to do that. Taking this out again was magic. It was golden. I don't want that to wear off. We're taking it to Europe and doing six England dates and that's it. If we push it further, it will go from gold to silver. Then to bronze. Do you know what I'm saying? I want it to end on a shiny golden note, with people saying, "Well wasn't that amazing to see the Frantic Four one last time?" That's how I want to leave the legacy of the 'old' Quo.

I think it's a great way to close the chapter - some diehard fans fondly remember the Frantic era and haven't accepted the latter version, so it's a great way for them to see the originals again. Personally, I like the Frantic Four but I also love current Quo.

So do I, or I wouldn't be in it! It's a different class, it's much slicker. The playing is much

better, where the magic in the old Quo was it was a little ragged, that's where its charm was. The current Quo is basically a rock machine. It's almost autopilot - we go out there every night with 110% attitude and it rocks most nights. It's a totally different thing to the Frantic Four. We've been together a long time now and in that expanse of time, if we can't give the fans what they want, what can you do? For those fans you mentioned who dreamed of the day when they could see the Frantic Four again, that dream has come true. The current Quo will go on - we may cut the gigs down a little because we're not getting any younger. I still enjoy going out, we have a laugh and it's a great vibe but it's really hard work. You know the energy we put into a show. If that energy starts to drop away, then we need to cut down on the shows. Eventually, we'll have to stop. That will be a very sad day, because I've done this all my life. I've enjoyed it all - well, that I can remember. (laughs) We had a decade of drugs, I virtually lost the 80s! But for the most part, it's just been amazing. It still is, but how long we can do 85-100 shows a year at this pace, I don't know.

Of course, you have a sideline now that Francis and yourself are both film stars since 'Bula Quo' came out!

(Laughs) Film stars? I would say we're in a film. (laughs) The premiere was wonderful, the making of it was wonderful - and it's the hardest I've worked in my life! We worked on location from 7a.m. until 7p.m., then we shot nights from 7p.m. to 7a.m. A full week of that, but it was great fun. I just wish the film was a little... better, really! I'm a little disappointed with it. It's very difficult these days to make a movie for £1.5 million, which is what it cost. You can do a documentary for that, but a stunning visual film, out on location in Fiji with full film crew, it's very difficult. I'm very proud to have made a film and I'm flattered you called me a film star even if it was in jest, but I'd rather just say "I'm in a film"!

Francis told me he'd like to do another, but do it better.

We would like to do another. We'd want a lot more input about the script. On 'Bula Quo', it was our first time, we were told what to say, nudged here, helped there...

having learned something from it, Francis and I can be very funny talking as we talk to one another. We make each other laugh and we can read one another - after all these years, we should be able to! What I'd like to do is read the script and re-write it as Francis and I would say it. We'd ab-lib a lot of it. We've learned that. After watching the movie, there were countless times where I said to Francis "Oh God, you know what I should have said to you there?" That would have been so much funnier. We don't want to go and make an out and out comedy, but we would like to give people a few laughs. That's what disappointed me with 'Bula Quo' - apart from the underwater scene, there wasn't that much that was really funny. It's not the greatest script in the world, so it needed to be a bit funnier. If we do make another one, we talked about doing one in India, it will be better, we'll make sure of it. It'll probably be on a shoestring budget again, but maybe Francis and I will put in some money ourselves, even if it's just to have a trailer we can sit in when we're not filming. Francis and I were just sitting on the pavement when it was somebody else's scene, we had no catering, nothing like that. It was a great experience though, I'm really pleased we did it.

I really enjoyed the album that went with it too. Often Francis dominates the writing, but all of you weighed in pretty evenly there.

I looked at it as writing for screen, rather than stage. There's a difference. I read the script, it had scene with us getting shot at and chased, that's where 'GoGoGo' came from. We went to this amazing island which had signs saying 'Mystery Island' and I just felt I had to write a song called 'Mystery Island'. That's where the ideas came from. Apart from 'Looking Out For Caroline' and 'GoGoGo', none of the tracks suggested themselves to me as songs that would work on stage. I see the album as half of the product, the film as the other half. Put them both together, the film with the music, it really works. The album isn't a typical Quo album, it was not written with live performance in mind. The album is half the package with the film as the other half.

When I got the album, I listened to it with the mindset that it was a soundtrack, it wasn't a normal 'new' Quo album because these were written for a specific purpose. To compare it to other Quo albums would be like comparing Queen's 'Flash Gordon' album to their other records.

That's exactly how I saw it. That's why I say, if you watch the movie and listen to the songs as part of it, then it all makes sense. I do like the album but I feel it needs to be taken in context with the film. I shouldn't be saying this really, I should just say the album's fucking great and leave it at that!

Ticket details to see the Frantic Four are available from www.statusquo.co.uk

