

# Status Quo



**When the news broke that veteran Rock band Status Quo were going to do an acoustic album, reactions ranged from curiosity to incredulity to moans of despair. However, the stunning 'Aquostic' record garnered excellent reviews and hit number five in the UK album chart. With eleven weeks in the charts so far (bringing Quo's career tally up to a staggering 500 weeks in the Official Album Chart!) the band are set to head out on a selection of 'Aquostic' dates. With their performance at the Roundhouse, televised by the BBC, to be released on CD, DVD and Blu-Ray, Francis Rossi talked to James Gaden about how the band feel about this new weapon in the Quo arsenal. Photos by Christie Goodwin.**

**Last time we spoke (back in Fireworks #66), you had just released 'Aquostic' – you were really happy with it, but you seemed to be second guessing how it would be received, because it hadn't gone on sale at that point. Last time I checked, it was your best selling album since 'Don't Stop' in 1996, I believe?**

Oh, easily, I think we're up to a couple of hundred thousand copies now. That's phenomenal for these days. That would have happened in a couple of weeks years ago, but we can't keep thinking that. It's difficult to keep that out of one's mind, but just the same, it's a mark of great success in today's market.

**Do you feel a bit more validated now that the record sales are matching the effort you have put in?**

Kind of, but like everything else in this business, you could make the absolute biggest thing of all time, and do you know what you have to do after that? Come up with another one. Since our very first hit, it was all "Yay!" and then "Have you got another one?" Hang on, we're still doing this one! I said last time we talked if it did well we'd probably have to do another one and sure enough, I think there's talk of another one. On this planet we seem to always want new all the time – we'll be up to 'Taken 4' soon, won't we? (laughs)

**Have you gone off the idea of another one? Last time you were quite enthusiastic about it.**

Yeah, but remember I was still in that zone then! (laughs) The reality has hit now, we've

got a hit album. It was a bit like when we had our first hit, 'Pictures Of Matchstick Men'. You have this idea of success, you see it on 'The X Factor', you think if you get a hit, mum and dad will be happy, boyfriend or girlfriend will be happy... but the reality is you wake up the next day and everything is exactly the same, except you sold a product. That's what's happened here. We were all elated with the response, every time we heard the album was still in the charts we were going "Yes!" (laughs) I do play things down sometimes, but it doesn't mean I don't really appreciate what we've achieved.

**Is there any reticence about doing a second acoustic album because of what happened with 'Don't Stop' – i.e. you did a covers album, it did really well, so then you had to do another one with 'Riffs', then another one with 'Famous In the Last Century'...**

It got to be fucking murder. There was this guy, I won't say his name, this happens a lot in the business... this guy called himself an "ideas man". He came up with the idea of Quo doing an album of famous riffs – the 'Riffs' album. Because he had a mate in the record company at the time, it was dictated to us that was what we would do. I was really livid. The fact we did the first covers album was okay. It was strange, there was a period where a lot of long standing acts were doing covers albums, it seemed like nobody knew what to do anymore! Then it does well, so the logical progression is to do a follow up. I suppose you can say we could have had the integrity to say no, but that's bullshit,

we live in a capitalist world. So to do another acoustic album, it might be great. But it might not be able to live up to this one.

**Well, you have the option to do more songs re-worked acoustically, and then add in some brand new acoustic tracks to give it a different slant.**

I have thought about that, because I think I told you before, most of those songs started out acoustically. I've had a solo album for about a year and a bit which has supposed to have been delivered but I got into 'Aquostic' so much, I thought there was no point doing anything with that. There are a couple of songs on there which are acoustic and I'm wondering if I could use those... then that gets my creative juices going and I end up committed and a few months later I'm thinking "Hang on, how did I get here? I was planning on slowing down a bit, I'm 66!" (laughs)

**You've done your first 'Aquostic' gig now, at the Roundhouse. It was televised and is going to be released. Did it match up to how you envisioned it, was it better, was it worse?**

It was better. John Edwards suggested we do a preview with some guests. It snowballed a bit and we ended up with about 600 or 800 people. My wife was there, waving at me – I can't wave back, silly woman! There were various people we knew, lawyers, friends, all that kind of stuff. That preview night, fucking hell, it was like playing to dead fish. They just didn't react like a Quo audience. They all loved it, but they aren't a Quo audience – my kids were there, they're just sat watching their dad, you know? So the second night comes up and we were quite nervy. Jo Whaley is just about to announce us, I'm ready and suddenly the roar of the audience goes up. I thought "Shit, we'll never manage that level!" Usually, that roar goes up, we start and Rick's guitar just obliterates everything. Well that's not going to happen at an acoustic show, is it? So that split second, I thought it was a dreadful mistake.

As soon as I sat down though, it was fine. Normally for that first twenty minutes you're saying to the crowd "Come on, come on!" When you're sat acoustically, all you can do is let the song do it. It was relaxed and I thought it was fabulous in my mind. I'm frightened to watch it back though in case it's not what I thought... so I don't look!

**I've been pleasantly surprised by the reaction. We've spoken before about die-hard fans who don't like the post 'Frantic Four' era Quo, but even a lot of those seem to enjoy the acoustic renditions.**

Quite a lot of die-hards were there on that night. There was one guy, we've known him for centuries, his name is Alan Crook. I always pick on him when I see him in the audience. I didn't think he'd like it because he's a good fan, he's like that loyal football supporter who comes even if he knows you'll be shite. He always turns up and I couldn't get him out of my eye line. After the event he spoke to John and he passed a message on saying "I just couldn't believe it was that good!" He was gone, really into it. Whether that translates into selling loads of tickets, I don't know. They seem to have sold alright. Where it goes from there, I really don't know.

**As you said, you're used to coming out with lots of noise and you and Rick doing poses and getting people going. Was it tough to keep that in check when you're sat for the show?**

Yeah, I got a hot arse! I've got to sort that, I actually addressed the crowd about it to say it was burning my derriere. It was like there was a torch up it, what the fuck is going on? I realised I was sat on some synthetic fibre and I felt like I needed to shove some ice up my backside. But we don't want to talk about that. (laughs) I think Rick misses that, he prefers the electric stuff ideally, he's that archetypal posing, pouting blonde – he does that really well. I'm only too glad to get away from that. I still do it, but I'm on autopilot a bit, I don't necessarily believe it. I actually enjoyed the fact that you can't do it, you have to concentrate on playing nice and tidy and getting the crowd into the song.

**You've booked a few gigs for the acoustic shows, including the Royal Albert Hall on the list, which must be a cool place to play?**

I get the impression that 'Aquostic' has maybe been purchased by people who wouldn't necessarily have bought a new Quo electric album. I've had all kinds of messages and texts from people saying they've bought tickets for the Albert Hall. They've never text me to say they bought tickets to see us in Hammersmith! The venue can do that – "It's the Albert Hall, it must be good!" I think in our minds there is a certain element which means you can put something into a certain venue and people don't mind paying more. When we played the Roundhouse, that's showbiz, "Oh yes, the Roundhouse..." It's a fucking railway

shed! (laughs) We thought it would be really cheap to tour this, as it turns out, it's *much* more expensive doing this than it is the other thing. If we were just talking about the money, which I love and I don't mind saying that... people tell you they don't, they aren't telling the truth! But we could put on an electric tour and make more money.

**How come the acoustic side is more expensive, is it because of the violinists and extras like that?**

You have those extra players who are expensive, you have more people moving around so that means more crew, more equipment, more of everything. On top of that, playing those "better" venues costs more. To cover the costs of that, you need to put the tickets up, but because this is a new thing people are a bit "Whoa, hang on..." Up until now, Quo were a safe ticket, you could put us on and X amount of people will turn up, guaranteed. With the acoustic side, nobody can be certain of that until we've done some, so Live Nation, the German promoters, everyone is a bit less sure.



**After the acoustic gigs, you have some electric dates coming up. Do you think you'll be reinvigorated for them after the more relaxed 'Aquostic' stuff, or are you worried it might be hard to get that energy back?**

I don't know, I'm a little frightened because the last tour we did at the end of the year, that tour we always do, I don't think was our best by any shot. I think we overcooked the set a little, put one or two too many in it... I really don't know, it feels a bit like Pandora's Box, you shouldn't have fucking opened that, should you? (laughs) So whether it's that spoiled little child in me, when he's doing acoustic he wants to do electric and when he's doing electric he wants to do acoustic, I don't know. Once I started playing that first acoustic show, I thought "This is alright." I was more nervous, I noticed my voice faltered a bit at the beginning. Normally you'd correct that stuff, but we left this like the first Quo live album, where it was untouched, just put it out as it was on the night. I'm looking forward to making it better – after one or two shows you can't be where you want to be, you have to play it and play it. I'd really like this to work though because I'm 66, I need a break.

**Would you consider doing the shows as a combination, having both acoustic and electric in one night?**

A few people have come up with that, and I have a problem with it. You could start with the acoustic, then change the stage over for the electric. I reckon to change things over you would need twenty to thirty minutes and I'm a bit too old to work that long. And the electric set being second, that's the hard work. I'm not convinced the two work together. If you try and put in an acoustic portion in the middle of an electric set, you'd have to change the set up to do it right, so that won't work. Plus that would be even more expensive because you'd have all those other people on the road and you're not even utilising them for the full show.

**Gotcha – that's why I do interviews and don't book shows!**

(Laughs) It does sound a good idea, but when you break it down you think "Oh shit, yeah..." It's different to when we were touring in the seventies. Everything is much more budget driven and serious now, everyone watches every last penny. It has to be that way, the way things have gone. It's an idea but I can't see how we would make that work – doing an acoustic show, having a break and then thinking "Shit, now we've got the electric show." And if you tried opening with the electric, the audience's ears are shot so you can't follow that with acoustic. On paper it looks great but I don't think the two will marry.

**No, perhaps best to keep them separate. It's a pity the Albert Hall show couldn't have been filmed for the DVD, that would have looked brilliant.**

Yeah, but from management's point of view, without the Roundhouse show, we might not even have made it to the Albert Hall.

**True – have you played there before?**

Yeah, way back, we had a manager for a week, he was managing Joe Cocker and Leon Russell. We were put on that show and we were doing a piece where I traded licks with Alan Lancaster. Some bloke stood up and yelled "A load of old fucking rubbish!" at the top of his voice. Without missing a step, we went straight into the ending and went off the stage. (laughs) We also played there in the sixties I believe, on a Pop show with The Move and some others. Someone bet Alan that he wouldn't fall over on stage for a fiver. He did.

**(Laughs) Hopefully nobody falls over this time. I do think 'Aquostic' will be amazing in the Royal Albert Hall and it'll be a great way to end the acoustic tour.**

Thank you, I do too. You're making my bottom twitch with excitement now!

**'Aquostic! Live At The Roundhouse' is out now, on CD, DVD and Blu-Ray. Visit [www.statusquo.co.uk](http://www.statusquo.co.uk) for details of the 'Aquostic' tour which runs from the 20th-30th April.**