



James Gaden speaks to Francis Rossi and Rick Parfitt.

Status Quo first tasted chart success in 1968 with 'Pictures Of Matchstick Men' before they transformed themselves into a Hard Rock band with a trademark boogie sound. Dubbed by fans as 'The Frantic Four', the classic line up of Francis Rossi, Rick Parfitt, Alan Lancaster and John Coghlan released a string of hit albums. Lancaster and Coghlan departed, but Quo continued on. Now, with over 118 million units sold, over 100 singles released and more appearances on 'Top Of The Pops' than any other band, the group prepare for their annual winter tour. It's dubbed 'Accept No Substitute', to tie in with the release of a triple CD 'Best Of' collection and two-DVD set of the same name.

A winter tour, a double DVD set and a 3 CD set, plus reissues of three classic albums... it's a pretty busy period for you guys right now!

RP: What's new? This has been a busy period for us for 50 years! (laughs) We never seem to stop. I think this is the longest break we've had for a long time, we've been off for like six or seven weeks. I've had a shoulder operation because my left shoulder was completely fucked, so I'm pleased we've had this time off, I've been suffering with it about three years, so I'll be just about recovered and ready to rock for the tour.

The CD and DVD set, 'Accept No Substitute', is a really good collection of material.

FR: Nice title isn't it? And I think the package itself is quite good – as much as I railed against the idea of another compilation, it does strike me, like I've said to you before, Elvis Presley has been dead for yonks and I still

hear his fucking records. There is a demand for "new product" and when we all signed our contracts, we didn't realise there are certain exploitation rights and record companies will put things like this out. So we try and put in whatever input we can, particularly our manager keeps an eye on that. I like this, that it's chronological, it tells which albums they came from, there's the current band, the Frantic Four which people will like, the acoustic stuff people like, I think it's a really good package.

RP: I've not seen the finished article but we've put out so many songs over the years, the cream of them do seem to be on this collection. Hopefully, there is something for everybody on there.

The three CD set is a really good set of songs. I'd have trouble picking my favourite three Quo albums, let alone try to distill all the records into three discs.

RP: These days, we leave it

to those executive types who put out what they think is best. At this stage of my career, I'm happy to let them get on with it. I saw the list of what they were including and it looked pretty good to me. I think it covers all the areas, we have the rockers, some ballads, old ones, new ones, what more can you do?

FR: I'd have liked to have had 'Twenty Wild Horses' on there, but that's just jerking off, there's loads I could say "Oh, that would have been good." That was one of the problems when we did 'Aquostic', there's fucking hundreds we could have tried. I dare say we'll maybe do another one now we've tried it and know how to do it, we know it works and was well received. I think some of our better songs have come from the current band over the last fifteen years or so, hardcore fans might not agree, but I think we have a lot of things in there, like 'Beginning Of The End', 'Rock And Roll And You' or 'Jam Side Down', if they had been released back in

the day we'd have had serious hits with them.

'Jam Side Down' is great - personally 'Heavy Traffic' is my favourite Quo album you've ever made.

RP: I like you, do you know that? (laughs) I really enjoyed 'Heavy Traffic', there was some really good stuff on there. It's two totally different things. The Frantic Four had something that you cannot recreate, even if you try. You can put whatever musician you want to mirror Alan Lancaster's parts, or John Coghlan's parts, and it won't sound the same. There was something magical in the chemistry of the Frantic Four. It wasn't rocket science, it wasn't musically brilliant, but it's magical, and if you can find magic, you've cracked it. That's what the Frantic Four managed to find. This band now, in terms of musicianship, is a far better band. We've all moved on as musicians and maintained what Quo built on, which is the hard Blues based Rock band. I think we've maintained that, but upped the ante as far as the playing is concerned. 'Rhino' Edwards is such a class bass player, he's shit hot. With my right arm, and Francis' lead playing, because when he's in the mood Francis is a blinding lead guitarist... when he and I play rhythm, we play

totally different styles but you put the two together and it just sounds great. A lot of people think "Oh, we can do Quo, it's only three fucking chords" and they think that they'll sound like us, but they just can't do it. We haven't spent 50 years doing something everyone else can do. It has to be 100% commitment, if you half bake it, it'll sound shit. I think we still have the magic on certain nights, it's hair raising stuff playing live, and we can still write good songs.

FR: That was a good album, and the track 'Heavy Traffic' itself, I really enjoyed making that track. Some people won't like it because it's the current band and they think the old one was better, but it wasn't. With us having Leon Cave on drums now, he brings this feeling, you can feel it behind you, it's just like "Wahey, this is great!" Matthew Letley was a great drummer, technically better than Leon, but nobody comes to see Status Quo and says 'Hey, their drummer's good.' We had chemistry in the seventies, but that line up couldn't shine this band's boots musically. That's not being negative or nasty, I just get so many people telling me this version of Quo doesn't count, the old one was real, I don't think they know what they are talking about. Both Rick and I found that. Even my wife, she only comes to a couple of shows a year, but she saw the reformed Frantic Four line up, she had no idea what we were about and she said "I can't believe how hard you and Rick worked." We had to drag it along, but we did it for the punters, and for Alan and John. Mainly for the punters, they fucking loved it. I was looking at the balcony at Hammersmith, and I just couldn't believe the audience. All I had to do was say "Alan Lancaster!" and "John Coghlan!" and people just went mad. It was pure nostalgia, which was beautiful. But to keep going on is a mistake.

For those people who are only interested in the Frantic Four era, there's also the deluxe reissues of 'Hello', 'Quo' and 'Rocking All Over The World' so they can spend their money on those if they prefer that era to Quo's entire body of work.

FR: I don't really understand why 'Hello', 'Quo' and 'Rocking...'

honest. People can vote with their feet. If the product sells, great, if it doesn't, the record company gets shafted. If they really disagree with something, just don't buy it. I don't mean that as an affront, just don't buy it, that will make your point. Some fans have to buy everything though, I'm like that with Jeff Lynne and E.L.O. Anything with his name on, I have to buy.

Looking back across your career, were there any albums you felt were totally underrated, or should've been bigger?

FR: Yeah, 'In Search Of The Fourth Chord'. I thought that was a particularly good album, and I agree with you that 'Heavy Traffic' was a particularly good album. I think if those had come out at a different time, they would have done really well. But then, that's coming from a guy who is in the band, writes the material and loves the band! (laughs) I am going to say that, aren't I?

"...about three, four years ago I had a heart attack on the Thursday, operation on the Friday and on the Saturday I played the N.E.C., much against doctors orders. But I did it."

Rick Parfitt of Status Quo

RP: I think we lost our way around 'Perfect Remedy', I was never really sure about that but there were a lot of foreign substances flying around at the time! Life was fairly, shall we say, "rock and roll" to put it mildly. I lost track of what was going on from day to day, I was just out of it. Consequently, you look back years later and think "That could've been so much better, where was I, why didn't I do this?" but like the old saying goes, you can't cry over spilt milk. Then in the 90s we didn't have much going on and management said we should put a covers album out, and I think that was a dreadfully wrong move. Yes, the covers albums were good party albums to put on, but really not what I think Quo should have been doing. We vowed never to do another and we never will. 'Aquostic' did brilliantly, I was very happy with that, it was out of our comfort zone, nicely different, yet pleasing and rewarding. Hopefully we'll have another collection of songs

before we all end up six foot under to deliver another good Quo album. I'd really like to go out and make a definitive Quo album, which I know the fans want, a good, hard hitting solid Rock album.

FR: I think we did that on 'Quid Pro Quo' though, that's nearly an AC/DC record, everything was pretty much in A or B, the BPM's were all very similar, so I thought we sort of maxed it out there. Fortunately we did 'Bula Quo' after that which gave us room to do some different things. I don't think we could make an album like we used to without Alan and John, and then we get all the problems that come with it. We're a lot better players now and you can't make a record like that without Alan and John. I think the idea is based around "Oh, wasn't it lovely back then" without remembering the arguments, John flipping out now and again, Rick drinking far too much... I prefer the 'Aquostic' idea and it did really well in

today's market. I'd like to see if we can grow on that.

I interviewed Rhino recently about his solo album, and he said that his heroes were Keith Richards and the old Blues guy like Muddy Waters, guys who kept playing until they died, or were incapacitated. He said he never wanted to stop playing. Did you guys ever have a discussion about retiring or have you always thought you will, to borrow an album title, rock till you drop?

RP: I've dropped twice haven't I, with my heart attacks! (laughs) I had one about three, four years ago - had a heart attack on the Thursday, operation on the Friday and on the Saturday I played the N.E.C., much against doctors orders. But I did it. Then I had a heart attack again 18 months ago, in Croatia. They flew me home with the medical team, got me on the operating table at the Brompton, and I

had another heart attack, on the operating table. They repaired me, three weeks later I was back on stage. Now I've done my shoulder, had it operated on, I'll be alright. Francis often says on stage that tonight could be the night where one of us just drops, you never know, but what a way to go! (laughs) I'm joking, if I ever feel it to that extent, then I would pack it in, if it was completely knackered me. Even at 67 years old, and Deep Purple are the same, once you get up there and do a few gigs, you are like an athlete, you just adapt to it. I like being on tour, you get two sides of life. You have your family life at home where you are with the kids and are just dad, then you tour and become that other bloke, the "rock star". It's really refreshing to have both, I'm very lucky.

FR: I used to say I'd like to die on stage, but I think I'd prefer to die upstairs in my bed with my family with me. I don't know how much longer we'll go on, it must be coming to an end soon, mustn't it? I said to Rick the other week "What do you think a 25 year old would think looking at us?" and he said "We look good." I said "To you and me, yeah, but to a 25 year old they'd be like "What the fuck are those two blokes doing?" I'd like to exploit the acoustic thing a bit more, I think that could give us some more years. We wrote most of our stuff acoustically and then turned it electric, so I got great joy out of the acoustic stuff. And we didn't have to sing so high, in the seventies it was all about pitching 'em high, and I would think "Jesus fuck, I can't sing up here!" All those things came to mind when we did 'Aquostic', it was really enjoyable, I'd like to do more. We do have serious outgoings though, we live the life and want to maintain it. But who knows, I might not make Christmas, I could drop dead next week!

Will you re-jig the setlist to suit the new CD set?

FR: We don't really know, we've got to the point with the set where we think it's as good as it gets. Then people say we should change it, so we do it to appease them and Rick and I are up there going "This isn't as good." We will try a few things, but it won't be a massive change

I don't think, because that would be a change for change's sake. I'm far too fucking old for that. I think we'll do the set that works and if it isn't going over then we'll start changing it while we're out. I'd love to give all the fans what they want, but if we play some of the hardcore stuff, a chunk of the audience will have massive question marks over their heads. We've been very lucky where we've had hard stuff like 'Piledriver' and all that, and been a Pop band and had all those hit singles. Most people know the hit singles, there's not many people now who listen to albums all the way through. I hear songs all the time and I think "Wow, that's great, who the fuck was that, it's someone else now!" because they've gone. I lament the loss of national radio, we're all so spoiled for choice now with so many radio stations, TV channels, there's too much. Back when there was the old Radio 1, everyone listened to it, you'd hear 'Shaddup Your Face' and you could say "I don't fucking like that, what a load of shit." But that's gone, now I just listen to Country music stations. Go to the supermarket, to buy cereal. You get to the aisle, there's so many, I lose interest and move on. That's how it is with music, so much choice. Do you find that?

Yeah, look at the 80s when someone like Bon Jovi came out, they had a lot of TV and radio airplay, people all heard them, they had massive selling albums as a result. That platform isn't really there now.

FR: Exactly, you don't know if people are buying the CD, if they're downloading, if they bought the whole album or just the song they heard... back when you had a vinyl record, you aimed for about 38 minutes, two sides. A CD just keeps going and going, so you can't put a really strong track at number 12. With vinyl, we used to pick what opened side one, and closed side one. Then what opened side two and closed side two. Then we filled in the bits in the middle, to function as two full sides. But a CD album often fizzles out towards the end because you put the best tracks first. I do realise I sound like I'm 66. (laughs)

Do you both get fired up



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Francis Rossi of Status Quo

to go out on tour, or dread it until you get out there?

RP: I'm a bit worried about my arm because the muscles are a bit limp after my operation so I need to start working with it. Once I'm playing again I'm sure it'll build back up. Sometimes the thought of rehearsals and standing in that hanger for a week, playing to a wall, going through it and through it, yeah, it's a drag. But when you get out in front of that audience again, and you get that magic, it's all worth it. I'm not saying that happens every night, some nights it's absolutely crappy, but everyone has bad days at the office. Some nights the sound on stage is fucking awful, but there's nothing you can do about it.

FR: We can go out and think "Oh for fuck's sake." I actually get more and more frightened of going on stage now, if I'm honest. We played the Hallenstadion in Zürich recently and it was a fantastic night, I really enjoyed it, but I really didn't want to go on at first. Sometimes you are on stage and you're just looking

forward to coming off. There are plenty of times when we don't enjoy ourselves because we can't hear our guitars properly, the sound isn't right... there's so many things that can go wrong.

You went out on your own Rick, to perform with the Rock Meets Classic show. Did you miss the road?

RP: I was intrigued to go out on my own and do something without the band. Francis did a solo tour and enjoyed it, so when they offered me the gig, with a 30 piece orchestra, choir, playing Quo songs... I'll have some of that! It was wonderful, I really enjoyed it. I only played for half an hour and it was such fun to do. It was nice to have the show centred around me, rather than being part of "the band". I'll certainly do some more. It's such a great show to go and see, there's Ian Gillan, myself, Eric Martin from Mr Big, Marc Storace from Krokus, it's just a great show, proper show business which is what I always wanted to do. It's almost a Rock

variety show. It's a brilliant show to go and see... especially with me in it. (laughs)

Francis has put out a couple of solo albums, and you actually made one Rick, but never released it. Do you regret not trying the solo route?

RP: No, but I haven't ruled out doing one. I have some stuff going on which I'm not sure would suit Quo. I have four or five tracks in the bank which are ready for when the time is right. It isn't yet, but I'll know when it is. I will do a solo album at some stage. I don't know quite when yet, but I will say in the not too distant future.

As you've done some solo work outside of Quo, Francis, is there anything left you want to achieve?

FR: I still feel like we're trying to get somewhere, chasing the carrot on the stick, that's what keeps me going. I'm still trying to reach the carrot. I don't know what would happen if I did reach it! Perhaps I don't want to reach it, I just want to chase it. People say about what a hard working band we are, I'm glad they don't take the other view and think "Greedy fuckers aren't they?" I can't help but take that opposite view! All the time. It helps balance things. People can say "Quo are a great band aren't they?" and I'll say "Yeah... but most people don't like them." Four of five million people might love us, the rest don't give a fucking shit. That's good for me, it stops me getting carried away, thinking "Ooh, I'm something."

You mentioned about what a 25 year old might think in relation to what you are doing, but Quo span multiple generations, I know teens who think you are cool.

FR: Yeah, there is that cyclical thing where you get kids who think "Wow!" and we think "Really?" Then people in their twenties and thirties will think "What a set of tossers" and people in their forties will suddenly say "Quo, yeah, I quite like them now." It's weird. The longer we're around the more people suddenly start saying "Oh yeah, I like Quo now." I don't know why. I just know we've been very, very lucky and people say they are grateful, but I'm way beyond fucking grateful!