



# COMPANY MAN!

This year marks the 50th anniversary of rock legends **Bad Company's** formation, and the band's most celebrated vocalist, **Paul Rodgers**, is releasing his first set of new material in almost 25 years, titled 'Midnight Rose'. If that's not a reason for *Howard Johnson* to speak to him, then we don't know what is!

"I'M SORRY IF I sound a bit gravelly, Howard," Paul Rodgers says apologetically. "We've had a lot of terrible fires here in British Columbia recently, and the smoke has got to me a bit. I'm supposed to be singing at my niece's wedding on Sunday. I hope I'm still going to be able to do it."

Oh, the irony. Here I am on a phone call to the man regarded by many as possessing *the* greatest hard rock voice of them all, and he's telling me that his chosen musical instrument might just fail him. That's not happened to Rodgers all that often in the course of a professional career stretching back 55 years; a career that has seen him fronting three of rock's most iconic acts – Free, Bad Company, and Queen – and working with a true legend of the guitar, Jimmy Page, in The Firm.

"It's always very nice to hear," says the 73-year-old Englishman when I ask him how it feels when so many people refer to him as rock's greatest singer. "But I don't think I'm rock's greatest singer whatsoever. If I went onstage thinking I was the greatest ever..." Rodgers trails off in a bit of a reverie. "Anyway, let's just say that I keep the ego under control. Basically, I just do my thing."

That *thing* has given us so much joy over so many years. The number of songs that feature Rodgers on lead vocals that have to be considered classics of the rock genre is huge. 'All Right Now', 'My Brother Jake', 'The Hunter', 'Feel Like Makin' Love', 'Can't Get Enough', 'Shooting Star'... the list goes on and on. It's easy to forget just how big Free and Bad Co. were in the 1970s. For a while back then, Free were Britain's highest grossing rock act alongside Led Zeppelin, while the first three Bad Company albums all made the Top Five in both the US and the UK. I say to Rodgers that he must

have been one of the richest men in rock back in the day. "Well you know how it is," he laughs. "I think we did make a lot of money, but that doesn't mean I got to see all of it."

If at any point Paul Rodgers was ripped off by unscrupulous business types back in the day when rules were first being written and the music business resembled the Wild West, well the singer doesn't seem too downhearted about it. In fact – and despite the voice issues – Rodgers seems positively perky, if not entirely at ease with the interview process even after all this time. There's a reason for talking, though. He's got

"I ALWAYS ASPIRED TO EMULATE THE GREATS LIKE OTIS REDDING, WHO'S MY FAVOURITE SINGER OF ALL TIME. BUT OF THE GUYS WHO ARE STILL ALIVE, I REALLY ADMIRE ROD STEWART. WHEN HE SANG 'SHAPES OF THINGS' WITH THE JEFF BECK GROUP IN THE '60S THAT TOTALLY BLEW MY MIND."

a new album coming out, and 'Midnight Rose' is Rodgers's first solo set of new material in almost 25 years. But if you're expecting some revelatory hallelujah moment that led to Rodgers returning to the fray after such a long time out, I'm afraid

you're going to be disappointed.

"It's not as if I've *not* been recording during all that time," he explains. "I've actually released a lot of live albums and things such as [2014's] 'The Royal Sessions', my own tribute to the blues and soul music that I've loved *forever*. But eventually I started getting the itch to make an album of original songs the way I did back in the old days."

The process started organically.

"I got in the studio with a bunch of guys and a few ideas, and we started kicking things around. But somehow Sun Records got wind of what I was doing. I had sold part of my back catalogue to them a while ago, and they said they'd be very interested in anything new that I was doing. That gave me an extra boost to get started, one thing led to another and, well, here we are now."