

FROM ALEXA TO RICHIE ZITO
A TO Z OF AOR

CLASSIC
Rock
PRESENTS

INCLUDES 15-TRACK
FREE CD!



**DON'T STOP
BELIEVIN'**



**COCAINE, CHAOS AND KEYBOARDS
THE AMAZING STORY OF**


TOTO

...AND HOW THEY INVENTED AOR

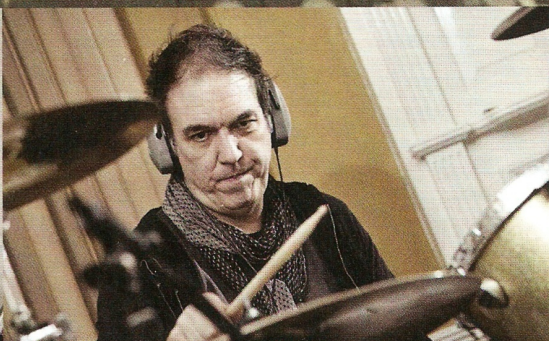


ON AIR

TUNE INTO THE LATEST
NEWS FROM THE WORLD
OF MELODIC ROCK



No static at all: FM hunker down at
Vale Studios' mixing desk to perfect
Desolation Station. (L-r) Jem Davis,
Merv Goldsworthy, Pete Jupp, Steve
Overland and Jim Kirkpatrick.



Takin' it to the studio...

Following a triumphant reunion at Firefest and a comeback album that's among their best, FM are hoping lightning will strike thrice.

Words: **Paul Elliott**

IN THE CONTROL room of Vale Studios in Worcestershire, where the new FM album is being recorded, singer Steve Overland is reflecting on his band's amazing comeback. "We never expected anything that's happened for us in the last two or three years," Overland says. "We've had our songs played on Radio 2. We've played at Download. We're playing there again this year. And we're doing the O2 in Dublin with Journey and Foreigner. It's just fantastic!"

FM, arguably the greatest British AOR band of all time, are very much back in business. As bassist Merv Goldsworthy says: "It's like you used to play for Arsenal 20 years ago, and now you're back in the first team at 50!"

In fact, FM are so busy this year that the release of their new album may be delayed until 2012. But with most of the recording completed, the band invited *Classic Rock Presents AOR* to the studio for an exclusive playback.

The album has the working title of *Desolation Station*. It is produced by FM and engineered by Chris D'Adda, who runs Vale Studios and previously worked on the band's 2010 album *Metropolis*. But as Overland explains: "This time we're much more focused. *Metropolis* was a bit of a trial thing. At that point we hadn't made an album for 15 years, so *Metropolis* was written before we really knew where we wanted to go. This time, we know what we want to do."

Overland describes *Desolation Station* as very much a group effort. Every song on the album is co-written by the whole band: Overland, Goldsworthy, drummer Pete Jupp, keyboard player Jem Davis (ex-UFO and Tobruk) and guitarist Jim Kirkpatrick, who joined FM in 2009. "With this band," Overland says, "it's always been about the songs." And on this new album are some of the best songs of FM's career.

Guilty is the kind of song that Bryan Adams used to write circa *Reckless*; *Story Of My Life* is an elegant piano-led power ballad; *Crave* is a pop/rock crossover so catchy it could have been written by Mutt Lange. Best of all is *Tough Love*, an 80s-style arena rock anthem that has Goldsworthy joking, "We've never heard of Def Leppard!"

In addition, there are two songs with an earthier quality: *Wake Up The World*, evocative of vintage Bad Company, and *High Cost Of Loving*, which has a riff like Whitesnake's classic 1980 hit *Fool For Your Loving*. With all this and more, *Desolation Station* appears set to continue what has been a most unlikely comeback for FM.

Back in 1996, when the band split up, they never believed they would ever re-form. As Pete Jupp recalls, "We just felt that we'd had our time, that we couldn't go any further." FM's career had begun promisingly: they had the backing of major label Epic and prestigious American management. They toured with rock icons such as Bon Jovi and Meat Loaf, recording two great albums, *Indiscreet* (1986) and *Tough It Out* (1989). And on the latter, they even had a couple of songs co-written with

Desmond Child, the famed 'hit doctor' who'd worked with Kiss, Bon Jovi, Alice Cooper and more. But as Goldsworthy says, "We couldn't make any headway. We had the big record company, the biggest publishers, but it really didn't help us."

After 10 years of diminishing returns, FM appeared to have written their own epitaph with 1995's *Dead Man's Shoes*. "We were burned out," Overland admits. But AOR never died – it simply went underground. In 2007, FM re-formed for what they believed was a one-off show at the Firefest event at Nottingham Rock City. It turned out to be the catalyst for the band's renaissance. "That show was unreal," Jupp says, "We had fans from all over the world, it was like Beatlemania!"

Goldsworthy remembers Firefest as "a big wake-up call for us". Even so, they remained cautious. When Jim Kirkpatrick had joined FM, replacing Andy Barnett, Overland told him they'd play "maybe five or six gigs a year". But as Overland now says,

"Getting Jim in the band transformed us." The guitarist jokes: "I dragged them out of the fucking doldrums!"

Equally important, according to Overland, was the role of the band's new manager Adrian Bell, who put together "a great team" to launch FM's comeback with *Metropolis*, including a plugger able to secure key radio airplay for the album's flagship single *Hollow*. "In the old days we got nothing," Goldsworthy says. "And then with *Hollow*, it's

straight on to Radio 2."

What followed, in June 2010, was even more surprising. As Jupp remembers it: "I'm sat in a coffee shop on a Thursday and I get a phone call: 'You're doing Download on Saturday.' Oh, alright then!" As late replacements for Ratt, FM appeared on the main stage at Download. "It was great," Overland says. "We hadn't done a big festival for so long. We didn't have a clue what was going to happen. And at the start, it was your usual lunchtime, mediocre response. By the end, all these people were walking across the field to see us."

FM return to Download this year, on June 10, playing on the Pepsi Max Stage. Their dream, says Goldsworthy, is to tour America. FM have never before played in the place where AOR was born: a place to which their music is perfectly attuned. But at a time when AOR has reclaimed its rightful place in popular culture – with Journey's *Don't Stop Believin'* gaining a second life via *The Sopranos* and *Glee*, and with Boston and REO Speedwagon songs being used in major TV ad campaigns – FM are aiming high.

As Steve Overland says: "The *Don't Stop Believin'* thing has been brilliant for us. Our kind of music is popular again. Only this time around, we don't feel any pressure to be Bon Jovi. We just do what we do. And coming back after so much time away, it feels great. I never thought we'd be doing what we're doing now, and I love it."

FM's latest EP, *City Limits*, is available now via www.flofficial.com.

"Firefest 2007 was unreal... It was like Beatlemania!"