

 Music



COOL: Manzanera on stage today and in 1972 in his trademark 'bug-eye' glasses, made especially for him

Guitarist Phil Manzanera tells Terry Staunton about the current Roxy Music reformation and his impossibly prolific solo career



CANADIAN police kicked the hotel room door off its hinges at three in the morning and pinned Roxy Music's guitarist to the bed while they searched his bags and belongings. Clothes and books were thrown across the floor until, after a few minutes, they found the pills... Thirty-six years later, Phil Manzanera can laugh about it but remembers it as "one of the most frightening experiences" of his life, if a little blurry in the fog of medication.

It took him a while to find the paperwork to convince the police the tablets were a perfectly legal prescription, before they moved on to the next room.

"They had seen pictures of Roxy and promptly concluded: 'They look like a bunch of druggies, let's bust them,'" says Phil, sitting in his North London recording studio.

"Every member of the band and road crew had their rooms searched but mine was the only door they bashed in because I was so out of it they couldn't get a reply.

"Funnily enough the one room they missed was where the only roadie who was actually carrying some dope was staying!"

Phil had been taking the pills for a few days after collapsing earlier in the tour and being diagnosed as suffering from exhaustion. Small wonder considering his relentless workload. Having made four albums with Roxy between 1972 and 1974 and toured extensively to promote them he was probably due a break.

Instead, when a gap appeared in the band's schedule Phil opted to return to the studio to record two albums of his own, finishing them just hours before boarding the Canada-bound flight with Roxy.

Both *Diamond Head*, his solo debut, and *Mainstream*, a collection of tracks by his first band *Quiet Sun*, are reissued this month coinciding with Roxy's latest UK reunion dates. They are very different beasts from the material produced by the band with which he made his name.

"I wanted to showcase the other kinds of music I was interested in: psychedelia, a little prog rock, some funky stuff. It's a very organic, musicianly thing. There was no pressure to record a hit-single for a change."

The solo album gave him the opportunity to work with one of his boyhood heroes, Robert Wyatt of prog rockers *Soft Machine*, who lived near the school Manzanera attended in Dulwich.

"He turned up with a Spanish dictionary and cobbled together these sentences, like a William Burroughs cut-up exercise. Total nonsense but my Spanish-speaking friends think it's rather cool," says Phil.

Wyatt was also an influence on *Quiet Sun*, Phil's teenage jazz-prog band who split when Roxy came calling but reformed for one last hurrah in the studio.

"I didn't tell Roxy's management or the record company what I was doing, I just sneaked a few sessions behind their backs.

"I'd work from noon until six on *Diamond Head* then go to the studio downstairs to work on the *Quiet Sun* record from six until midnight.

"If I'd told them what I was planning they would have never let me do it. I loved the day when I went to the label and told them: 'There's two albums, by the way.'"

PHIL'S FIRST group was initially consigned to history when he joined Roxy although he famously failed his first audition

("I played some *Quiet Sun* stuff to Bryan [Ferry] and Andy [Mackay, saxophonist] and they absolutely hated it."), losing out to Davy O'List, freshly departed from prog figureheads *The Nice*.

He finally got the job after O'List fell out with the group. "I was still hanging round rehearsals and saw Davy have a punch-up with Paul [Thompson, Roxy drummer] in a disused bingo hall in Wandsworth. Then I was in."

What Phil Manzanera brought to the Roxy palette was virtuoso guitar classicism steeped in jazz, blues, folk, traditional rock and shades of avant garde, which meshed

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'Roxy Music get together in five year cycles...and then we implode'

Pictures: BRIAN COOKE/Redferns



GLAM HEYDAY
Andy Mackay,
Paul Thomson,
Bryan Ferry,
Brian Eno,
Phil Manzanera
and Rik Kenton
in the Seventies

perfectly with the art-school sensibilities of Ferry and Brian Eno. This is an often overlooked component of the band's other-worldly retro-futurist sound on such tracks as *Pyjamarama*, *Do The Strand* and *In Every Dream Home A Heartache*. However, he escaped the visual makeover. "I was always the token hippy," he says with barely-concealed pride. "When the

others were having their hair dyed different colours the management suggested that I should stay the way I was, keep the beard, as if to still have one foot in the past! I think the idea was not to scare the punters too much with all the radical futurist stuff." Phil's one nod to the Roxy "look", however, was the iconic bug-eye sunglasses, made for him by fashion

designer Anthony Price, who was responsible for much of the band's stage gear and album sleeve artwork. "I've still got them here in the studio. I ask visitors to put them on so I can take a picture for my wall. I've got snaps of all sorts of people like Jarvis Cocker and Jonathan Ross. Jarvis was going to wear them in a Harry Potter film. There was a

plan to have him and Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead make a cameo as a band playing at Hogwarts."

It's unlikely Phil Manzanera will dust off the specs for Roxy's latest batch of shows marking the group's 40th anniversary, their third reunion since the start of the century. Phil turns 60 during the tour's run.

"We tend to be able to work with each other in five-year cycles before it all implodes and we head off to do hundreds of other things," he says. "We are like brothers, and brothers fall out every now and again but when we get together to play, the music casts a spell on us."

"The music is like another brother holding us together. It transports us back to who we used to be."

THE FRATERNAL bonding has yet to result in the release of any new material (it's 29 years since Roxy's last album, *Avalon*). Studio sessions from 2006, which saw Eno return briefly to the line-up, spawned what Phil calls "sketches" of about a dozen songs that remain in the vaults, although one piece instigated by the guitarist turned up fetitied BF Bass on Ferry's current album, *Olympia*.

"When we were last in the studio together Bryan said he couldn't write lyrics any more or at least he couldn't come up with lyrics that he felt suited Roxy. He has very high standards and if he feels something's not right we have to respect that."

"I've still got those sketches on my iTunes but whether any of them will ever see the light of day, I don't know. We would all like to do something new and interesting but there's the Roxy legacy to consider. You want it to be amazing but you have to ask yourself: 'Is this really good enough?' It would have to be something very special, otherwise you might as well just get on with your gardening."

"So the tour is a celebration of the past, of 40 years of Roxy Music. We are digging deep into the old records, playing a few things we have never played before. We want to push the boat out a bit because who knows if we'll ever play together again?"

● *Quiet Sun's Mainstream and Diamond Head* are released tomorrow. *Roxy Music* are currently touring; for details visit roxymusic.co.uk