

MAY 1985

## Biography

# SUPERTRAMP

**A** world class rock outfit charting a new course, Supertramp embarks on a bold adventure to inventive frontiers in modern music with *Brother Where You Bound*.

"I now find myself less scared of saying something that might have a bit of a political edge to it," inflects enigmatic songwriter, keyboard player and lead vocalist Rick Davies. "I tend to read more newspapers, listen more to what is going on in the world, and in turn, I'm prepared to risk my neck a little more with this album." Streamlined to a core of four pivotal members last year, the group of Davies, saxophonist John Helliwell, bassist Dougie Thomson and drummer Bob Siebenberg have successfully collaborated as an innovative force in rock since 1973.

Supertramp's singular and evocative vision has glowed consistently through its timeless melodies, obsession for musical perfection and unique charm on landmark efforts such as *Crime Of The Century*, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, *Even In The Quietest Moments* and the personal travelogue *Breakfast In America*, which have struck an important chord in listeners on five continents. Twenty five million records later, Supertramp has undeniably penetrated popular culture with a sophistication and message all their own.

"The key reason why we have kept going on is that our roots go pretty deep compared to some bands whose influences may only go back a few years. Our roots go back quite a long time — jazz, R & B, the Beatles and the 50's and 60's," comments John Helliwell.

As Supertramp enters a refreshing chapter in its historic career, the essential challenges and stimulus remain constant: to deliver quality compositions and thought-provoking lyrics in unison with an ideal dose of goodhearted fun.

More than ever, on *Brother Where You Bound*, the sound, the signal and the band are unmistakably Supertramp.

### Interview

**You've been with Supertramp for a dozen years. How has it evolved, and how has it changed for you?**

Bob: When things first started up, we traveled in one little car playing colleges. Things progressed through to headlining our own gigs, and we noticed more people coming all the time. I can remember the first time that the crowd applauded as the lights went down, because they were into the group before it started playing. It's little milestones like that that are part of the story of how the group evolved and has become a larger than life thing.

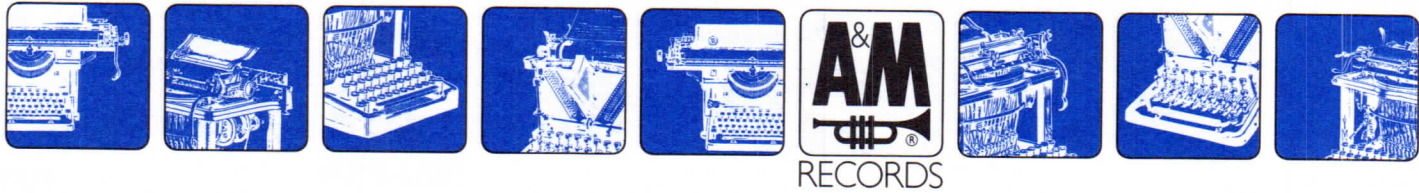
**Has it fulfilled your wildest dreams?**

Bob: Even more so, at a certain level. My dream was to become a well paid famous drummer in a group. I grew up during the Beatles, with surf music and stuff like that, and I always wanted to be one of those guys. But once you get there, you don't really have a plan for what happens after. It's then that you have to take stock of what you're going to do. So I have a whole new set of goals.

**What attracts the fans to Supertramp?**

Bob: I have always believed that the group attracts its fans by the emotional output of the members, which you can sense in the instrumentation. We're not real glamorous, and there's no element of "phony" about us. We have always strived for quality in everything that we do; in the production of our stage shows and our records, right through to the people we hire to help us.





**Does the music convey the feeling of all four of you?**

Bob: I think it does now, especially with this new record. It is a more focused attempt at getting across exactly where four people are at right now. Years ago, we started off focused, held that focus for quite a while, then started to drift a little bit. This time, we knew where we wanted to end up even before we got started.

**You haven't toured since September 1983. Do you miss it?**

Bob: I do, yeah. I'm hoping that the group goes out and does some shows as soon as possible. It's a turnaround for me. I didn't really feel like going out on the last tour, but it was probably the best touring experience I've had. It showed me that I could kind of skate through a lot of the situations that I had a hard time dealing with in the past.

**Do you feel the music on the new album will transcend easily into live performance?**

Bob: Yeah, I do. I think the music on this record is some of the most accessible stuff that we've come out with over the last two or three records. We now feel a bit freer to bring in people from the outside to help us recreate the music in the live shows. We had some real good players on the LP, especially a guitar player named Marty Walsh, who we would probably want to take on the road.

**When you go into the studio, what is the chemistry that makes a recording session work?**

John: We spend a long time getting the backing tracks just right. Although we rehearse a lot, sometimes it's just a question of the moment when everything really jells together. It could take days, it could happen on the first take.

**How did cutting this album compare to previous ones?**

John: A little less chaotic, because there are fewer people to deal with. And although we're a bit more businesslike in our approach, it took a long time because we are still perfectionists.

**How do you create the sound of the album on the road?**

John: Aha! We have managed in the past pretty well; of course, there were five of us, and up until the last tour in 1983, we did do everything ourselves. On the last tour, we had two extra musicians, one guy played sax, guitar and keyboards and the other played guitar and keyboards. We felt it would give us a fuller sound, and it did, it did work. Now that there's four of us, we shall definitely have to use other musicians, especially a guitarist, to give it a full, big, sound.

**Has Supertramp fulfilled your musical dreams?**

John: Not 100 percent, but it's been very good. I'm quite happy, because I've enjoyed what the group has done, and hopefully, will do. At some point in the future, I can do a solo album and get that off my chest, so to speak; but I'm still happy playing with the guys.

**What do you think is the direction of Supertramp now?**

John: It's more earthy, more R & B, perhaps it's more jazz influenced. I'd like to see it continue in that vein.

**Is it commercial?**

John: We shall see. I really like it. Our philosophy throughout has been to do the best we possibly can, and fortunately, it's been popular.

**When you say, "the best possible," is that pleasing yourselves?**

John: Yes, that's the first thing.

**Do you listen to a lot of music?**

John: Yeah, I like classical music, jazz, R & B, pop, rock, sort of stuff. I listen to quite a wide variety. It's my hobby as well.



**Has Supertramp become business as well as an enjoyable music career?**

Dougie: To a certain extent it has, and I think that's a part of the responsibility of taking something out in the world and making money from it; you have to have a sense of responsibility as to what that means. But it doesn't have to become overpowering, and it still has to have a musical base.

**Do you think the record will bring out individual efforts? John has called the band "the faceless group." Do you agree with that?**

Dougie: Yeah, the band doesn't really have very much of a visual identity.

**Would you like it to change?**

Dougie: Personally, I like to be able to go to a concert and wander around amongst the people. It's quite an interesting situation to be a part of the audience, wander around and get a feel of those people, and then fifteen minutes later be on the stage performing in front of them — I enjoy that.

**Is the acceptance of a musical group different in Europe than it is in America?**

Dougie: In style, but not in nature. People go to get entertainment and enjoyment from music, that's universal.

**The title of the album is *Brother Where You Bound*. Is there any special meaning behind it?**

Rick: The title piece from the album, "Brother Where You Bound," is something that's been around for 4 - 5 years and has slowly grown like some big monster. The band and people around me have been telling me to do it for a long time, and finally we've got it on tape. We tried to do it on *Famous Last Words*, and we couldn't quite make it work with everything else that we were doing at the time. It's a sort of abstract odyssey or oddity of a piece about a paranoid character who is convinced that the country is going to be taken over by forces unknown. Because a lot of the piece is instrumental, we will try and illustrate it with a film. After much cajoling, we have managed to get A & M interested in doing just that. It will be difficult, because it's basically the length of the track, 20 minutes, and it's a bit of an abstraction. But with the soundtrack, I think it will be quite an impressive piece.

**Rene Daalder, a European director, has been hired to direct the piece. Why did you choose him?**

Rick: Rene Daalder is a Dutch director, and it was felt that his European background would better enable him to pick up on the feeling of the track and look at the American scene from a distance. I think we have a certain rapport, and that's extremely lucky because the piece is a little strange. He immediately identified with it and felt that he could really do something that would compliment it.

**Do you envision it as a theatrical release or a video piece?**

Rick: We're thinking about everything. In Europe, they still sometimes play short films ahead of the feature. Also, it will be simulcast on T.V. and radio stations, which I think would be quite effective. Someday it might even become part of the live show.

**How do the other tracks compare to the title track?**

Rick: I think the album tends to slowly veer towards the dramatic as it goes. We start off with a very dancey sort of thing called "Cannonball," and then we have three more pieces on side one. The last piece on side one is "Better Days;" it is basically about somebody faced with a choice between left and right in politics, and how it can all sound the same. And that gets you into a slightly more serious mode for the second side.

**You wrote all the songs?**

Rick: Yeah, I'm writing everything on this one. It hasn't been too bad because of the long track, which is virtually the entire second side. You know, it might be the next album that really puts me to the test.



**Does that influence your playing?**

John: Yeah, really, my playing's influenced by the great jazz saxophone players, but my musical experience is influenced by the wide variety.

**Where would you like to see Supertramp in the future?**

John: In the past, we've been kind of a faceless group, a bit like Pink Floyd in a way, known for the quality of our music, both in live performance and on records. I'd like to continue that, and I'd also like the public to really know that we're serious about what we're doing, but we're a bit earthy too. So I think this new album will give that image, because it is like that.

**Supertramp has had phenomenal success on five continents. How do you top what you've already achieved?**

Dougie: It's difficult to think of topping, and how could you measure that? By the number of people that you play to? By the size of the places? I think what we're trying to do now is take a bit of time and make something slightly different.

**In the new album, what is different?**

Dougie: There's a much tighter, grittier concept to the record than the last few records that we've done. I think we've gotten back to a bit of our original, harder direction.

**Are you planning a tour?**

Dougie: Because Roger's gone now, and the band has a slightly different direction, I think it would be unfair to unleash ourselves on an unsuspecting public. So I think it's worth taking the time to let the people hear the new Supertramp and see some of the visual ideas that we've been working on before we can take the band in front of the public.

**You use the phrase "new Supertramp" — is there a definitive newness to it?**

Dougie: There's a newness amongst ourselves, because times have changed. There was a tension that always existed, because there were two writers and two completely different ways of doing things; that tension has disappeared.

**What about a solo career? Any desires?**

Dougie: One of these days, perhaps, but I don't have any real solid aspirations at the moment.

**Do you listen to the radio and hear what other groups are playing, the musical trends?**

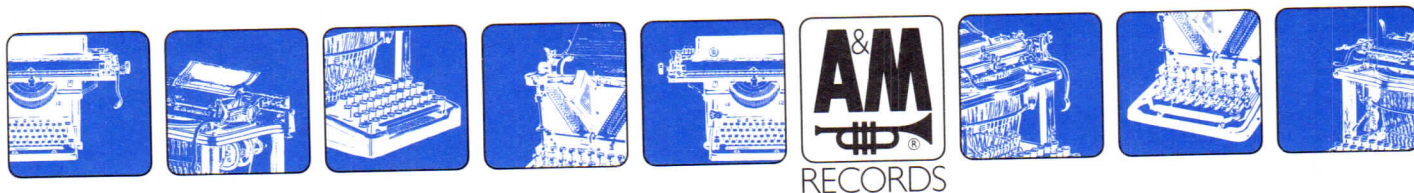
Dougie: Yeah, all the time. But recently, I've found myself listening to more and more alternative forms of radio, because there's an awful lot of other forms of music going on that is not necessarily acceptable to commercial radio.

**Is Supertramp's music commercial?**

Dougie: "Commercial" is a very interesting word. I think one of the things about Supertramp's music is, it's got a sound that is immediately recognizable, but it's never been locked down into one style of music. There are songs for all different people, so from that point of view, yes, it's got commerciality — it has a very broad appeal.

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**When you have finished one album, do you start thinking of the next one?**

Rick: Yes, especially when you finish an album. You tend to get a little bit of a letdown after all the intensity of recording, and then you've got it done, you sit there and think, "Well, now what?" The healthiest thing is to start to think what would be a nice way musically to follow it.

**Did you ever feel that when Supertramp started in 1969, it would still be in existence in 1985?**

Rick: I had no idea how long Supertramp was going to last. I know that when we did start, I wanted something that was going to be pretty solid, and I liked the idea that we could be around for a long time. Without becoming old hat or dinosaur, I think we've achieved that. We haven't over-exposed ourselves and people know they can always rely on Supertramp to give them a good show, good sound, good lights and production values. That enables us to go out there with a pretty good following, whether we're in or out of fashion.

**Have limited albums and limited touring been calculated to be that way?**

Rick: I think it's been an instinctive thing that's just happened. We've just gone along with what felt right, all the way up to Roger leaving, when we felt that we were starting to fall into a formula. Roger would write one song, I would write another, and it was a question of, "Well, how can we break out of that."

**This feeling of one song from you and one song from Roger, is this the reason that there hasn't been a Supertramp studio album in three years?**

Rick: Not really. After we did *Famous Last Words*, we took sometime to cool out, because it was a trying album to make. Then we went on tour in Europe and the States for quite awhile. Of course, Roger left after that, and I wrote the material for this album. There's your three years right there.

**When you write, do you think of commercialism?**

Rick: Some songs strike you as, yes, "I think that could really get through on the radio, I think this could really be a hit." Sometimes you think that it would be successful as a single or something, sure.

**Is the business side of the music business frustrating for you?**

Rick: Rock and roll is basically a commercial medium, and it's something you have to face. Its popular music, and that means that people have to go out and buy it. We are all subject to the public's reaction.

**What has been the key to keeping the four of you together?**

Rick: I think the reason that we stay together is that we can relax with each other. We don't have huge egotistical arguments or stuff like that. Ever since 1974 with *Crime Of The Century*, the band has been pretty mellow. We do have differences, it's inevitable, but basically it's never been too heavy.

**You recorded the album at your own studio in your home. Is it more comfortable working there?**

Rick: Well, I like to record both outside and at home. To get really good backing tracks, I think you should go to a top class studio. In our case, we used Ocean Way, which is really fantastic. And then, of course, when you get home, you can take as long as you like to get into your overdubs. For mixing, again, you should go outside. Actually, it turned out to be about a perfect situation for us.

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**In addition to Supertramp, you have a solo career. Into what direction is that going?**

Rick: I have a solo contract, which, as yet, I haven't seriously thought about. I think the direction will be very different, because with Supertramp, although I'm the sole writer, we do have to get things past the "committee." With a solo situation, I think I would probably play with a lot of the new toys, and get into some of the new machines they have these days; *that* would be a bit different from Supertramp.

**If an album doesn't sell, do you take it personally?**

Rick: If an album doesn't sell, I take it that it wasn't really a good enough album. There are people that would argue that business is 50% of records, you have to have a huge promotion, top radio play, and everything else. But I think if you have a good album, those things follow. People in the business do respond. With Supertramp, we've always gotten out of something what we've put into it, almost all the way down the line.

**How do you feel about *Brother Where You Bound* ?**

Rick: All I can say about this one is that it's been 100% effort. If the public doesn't accept it on certain levels, I will be disappointed, but it won't be through any lack of effort.

### **Discography**

Supertramp 1970  
Indelibly Stamped 1971  
Crime Of The Century 1974  
Crisis? What Crisis? 1975  
Even In The Quietest Moments 1977  
Breakfast In America 1979  
Paris 1980  
Famous Last Words 1982  
Brother Where You Bound 1985