

Conversus Transcript

DM - I'm Don Merrill and I'm talking Russell Hitchcock. He and Graham Russell make the group Air Supply. First let's listen to this 1980 hit by Air Supply, All Out of Love.

Song - All Out of Love

DM - Mr. Hitchcock thanks for talking to me. The first question I wanted to ask you is you guys have just recorded a new album in Israel. Can you tell me about that?

RH - Well it's actually a concert video. We finished it about a year and a half ago. And it's just been released. You know every four or five years, we like to do something on DVD you know just to let people who haven't seen a show or have been and want some recollection of the evening. And it's just, you know, a straightforward concert. Obviously it's many of the songs people are familiar with but really it's just something about where we are you know at this point in our careers. Obviously the location was gorgeous. We've been to Israel a couple times before. The first time we were there, we actually made a little bit of a pact between us, our manager, Graham and I that we would record another live there, a live concert we would do it there. And it worked out great for us.

DM - I want to talk a little bit about history just for second. You know you're making new music and I know that you know you're always getting new people who are finding your new music but I wanted to sort of go back for people who have never been exposed to you. Now, your first album was called air supply and it was certified gold in Australia I think. But it took two more albums and remix of Lost in Love by Clive Davis to open things up for United States. Is it still true that in order for band making the music world they have to make in the US too?

RH - Yeah I believe that. Growing up and listening to music in Australia, before I was involved in Air Supply, and Graham Russell, I mean, we used to watch all the shows, Bandstand and Shindig and all those way back when and it always seemed as if once an act had success in the US, it was kind of a stamp of approval that you had made it on an international basis. And I believe that to be true to this day. People want to come here because it is the center of rock and roll I believe. It was always in the backs of their minds when we had success with this in Australia in the early days that we needed to to come here, and kind of prove ourselves on the international level.

DM - Right. When you recorded the earth is, there was a music video that said Air Supply was back. Now I've always been curious about the idea of a come back because to me for band say they've come back that kind of implicitly says they were gone somehow. I understand fans aren't buying the bands records of

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band might be out-of-favor but do band themselves ever say their back or is it the media or the record companies saying that?

RH - And well I think the reason that that happened in the first place was we stopped our relationship with Arista records. so consequently for a couple of years we didn't record anything. However this year of 2013 marks our 38th anniversary of Air Supply forming and our 38th year of being on the road. We've never been away from her performing live, Graham Russell and myself but we did stop recording a couple years so maybe that's where that all began. In fact it was reported to the Billboard once I believe that Graham and I had broken up which was never the case. Even when weren't recording or releasing commercial product, we were still working on demos and projecting ingrained studios.

DM – Okay. I was reading about how you gave in acoustic performance for fans in Cuba back in 2005 because hurricane Dennis had knocked out power. How many times have you carried on with the show even when the weather was bad and how it feel to see fans were willing to be out in that weather to hear you perform?

RH - Well as far as the Havana show was concerned, we actually played an outdoor show on the eve of the hurricane and was raining all night but we still had an audience of 175,000 people. So we were boarded up in our hotel and in fact I was in my room. Graham went downstairs and played an acoustic set with our pianist in the hotel lobby because there were so many people that were stuck in the hotel and people from other hotels who couldn't get back to where they were staying. We've done it a couple times and within Latin America. We've had the power go out when you half way through two thirds of the way through the show, we finished the show acoustically.

DM - What it would a nice gift and and it shows I guess if you are on stage playing during a storm in your fans are listening to play standing in the rain, I mean, I can't think of a more dedicated fan than that.

RH - Absolutely. I mean the weather was with atrocious and we couldn't see how bad it was because the dressing rooms at the venue in Cuba were underground and there was a tunnel covering from the dressing room to the stage, so when we walked out, we were basically playing in a storm. We got wet down and dirty and was an incredibly evening it was.

DM - When I look at older rockers on one hand I think I am so glad you guys are still kicking and performing and still making music and on the other hand I think damn, I hate to see you get old because it means that I'm getting old. When you when you do your shows and come see a shows. I mean are you guys drawing in

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young people with your music or do you care who you draw in?

RH – Absolutely. We've been lucky enough to get people who've been with us from the beginning who were teenagers then. They bring their kids and sometimes, their grandchildren. But over the past five or six years, there has been an influx again of young people coming to the shows, and we get quite a bit of exposure with songs and movies and television and commercials and stuff like that. We're very fortunate, and it's a cliché but we get from six to sixty at a show. It never ceases to amaze me because I'm 54 pushing 40 years and you know, I'm the same as you. I look at videos of stuff that we did in the late 70s and I think God, that was a lifetime away and I mean, I'll be 64 this year and I look at people are still performing at a great level the Rolling Stones and Paul McCartney you know are two of my favorite bands, AC/DC. I mean I love all those acts and if they're still doing it well is no reason why we shouldn't and we do well and I always said to Graham as long as we both feel good about performing together, as long as we enjoy you know, the time that we spent on stage together in the studio and as long as people want to see us, there's no reason to not do it. So we'll be here as long as we can, that's for sure.

DM - I was reading that Air Supply's music is really popular in Asia. What is it about your music or your lyrics that people in Asia like about it so much?

RH - Well I think the Latin America and in Asia, the kind of music that we play, melody is very popular in Asia and I'd like to believe that we had great melodies that are easy to kind of to latch onto lyrically. The songs aren't rocket science or complicated. They're simple songs that touch the heart. Also, we were one of the first bands from the US or any western country really to go to Asia on a regular basis. We first went there in 1981 I believe and we've been loyal to the fans. Consequently, that's been returned to us. I don't think there's been a year that we haven't performed at least two or three cities in Asia and typically we do Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippine, Indonesia, mainland China, you know, we did them all. We have a very loyal following, and as I said, we try to get back every year because obviously we don't get played on radio the new stuff pretty much anywhere in the world. So it's up to us to maintain our contact with the audiences and our fans through live performances.

DM – I was also reading that you visited India for the first time in 2006. Now you've been in existence since 1976. So how come it took 30 years to get India?

RH - It's a real simple answer. For any country that we haven't been to is because we haven't been invited. It's real simple. We have a great manager and a wonderful agent in Los Angeles. They know all the avenues for getting the word out that we're available and obviously we have a catalog of music that has existed now for 38 years. So we're not too difficult to find. It's really a matter of

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invitation.

DM - Your music is all about love, getting and losing love. How has the search for love been in your life and in the lives of the band. I mean, do you guys ever get inspiration for your songs from your own ups and downs in love?

RH – Graham writes 98 percent of the stuff we've ever recorded. And knowing him as well as I do and have, I think he's a great observer of people and relationships with people around him. Not necessarily the people he knows there. We go to a lot of restaurants and we hang out with the guys in the band and he is always looking, always observing. Probably quite a few of his songs are from his personal experiences but he would never admit to those.

DM – Right.

RH - But certainly, I'd like to think that because of the music and because of the way we perform and record it, I'd like to think of myself as a romantic and I think I'm a sensitive person. And that certainly helps doing what I do for a living.

DM - Your music took me through early adulthood and mid-adulthood. I might remember being in the Army and being engaged and longing for my new wife way back then when I was overseas. I mean, your music just made me happy and sad at the same time so I just wanted to say thanks for all that.

RH – You're welcome.

DM - You're performing with Rick Springfield right now and he told an interviewer that he loves playing the old stuff but he feels as if the old stuff he's released recently has been some of his best work and I was wondering do you guys feel like that, like the old stuff is what you're what your older fans want but the new stuff is what keeps you fresh?

RH – Well exactly. I know we wouldn't have the career we have without playing Lost in Love and Sweet Dreams and Every Woman in the World and Nights are Better. But, we never wanted to and we still don't want to be either labeled or perceived or personally feel like the past is all we have. We've recorded 25 CD's of original material. You know, most people have only heard five or ten of those. But you still have to do what you do and perfect or try to perfect your ... my voice, I want to be a better singer on the next recording than I was on the last one. Graham wants to write a better song. So we just keep working at it, but I would agree with Rick certainly. And we've recorded songs that I was sure would be successful at radio but we can't even get them played. Once you realize that you can't fight City Hall in that regard, you just punch on through and keep following your dreams, you know?

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DM - Now I'm curious about that. What is it about some songs that you just can't get played a mean it's not that they're not good songs. Do the radio stations have a big say in the what they ...

RH - I think that they have a great say, but I think the sad thing now is that a lot of radio stations are run by a company you know, which I'm not going to name. And those companies aren't run by people that are artistic. They're run by people that revenue is the bottom line and the only line. And I know for a fact, I'm really good friends with several radio programmers in the Los Angeles area and they get told what to play by people who aren't necessarily involved in music at all. And they also have the safety net of not losing listeners by trying something new when they know that people want to hear stuff that any popular group records years and years ago. So they keep recirculating the same playlists and the same stuff because they don't want to take a chance on you. And having said that, they haven't even heard the new stuff. I've had people tell me about recordings that were taken to radio stations or were presented on their behalf, they weren't going to play. We play all of their old stuff, we don't have time for anything new. So it's really a Catch-22 situation.

DM - You just recorded a relatively new album, Russell Hitchcock Tennessee Nashville session. What drew you away from soft rock and made you want to try country?

RH - Well I've always enjoyed all kinds of music. When I was a teenager, in my mid teens, I was a great Beatles fan when they came onto the scene. My dad had a lot of recording by Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett. My mother actually was a Charlie Pride fan. I listened to all kinds of music. A couple years ago, a friend of mine in Los Angeles who was doing a lot of work in Nashville quite flippantly said how would you like to try coming to Nashville and recording some songs? And of course, you know, I said why not? So we listened to probably two or 300 songs, I mean not all the way through of course. But we picked 25 and went to Nashville and recorded them. It's a double CD, I'm very proud of it. The songs are great. A lot of young writers that are new to the scene. They provided the material for me and I played with and got to record with some great musicians. And it's a solid thing I've done since I got into music and I've very thrilled with the results.

DM - Let's listen to something from that album. From Russell Hitchcock Tennessee, this is Far Enough Away from Colorado ...

Song – Far Enough Away from Colorado

DM - I was looking at the Graham Russell's website and is full of him standing in a doorway looking for sunrise with the words The Future Coming Soon. And you

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have a very extensive website with a store and pressroom and all kinds of stuff. You guys perform together but have you always nurtured your own careers? I mean, is it important have stepped identity sometimes like in a marriage is important to have joint and separate bank accounts?

RH - I don't know that that's necessarily the case with me. I think I've done these projects when we've had time to do them. And Graham's the same, he's got more of an itch than I do because he writes a lot more songs than we ever have the chance to record. And he writes songs for himself quite a bit, so he's recorded those. But I don't think we've ever really had the big, I want to have a solo career thing. I mean, yeah, he's done a few things, he lives just outside of Park City in Utah. He's done a few things up there acoustically. I've never performed on my own and have no desire to.

DM - How important is social media for both you to stay in contact with old fans and attract new fans?

RH - Oh it's the thing now. I know we have a Facebook thing going on. I don't Tweet, but I post messages on our website every couple of months. All the fans that send in notes to the website Graham and I answer personally. It's just really important because it's what's happening now. I mean we couldn't survive I don't think as well as we do without having that content online. I mean, you know, the Internet is it now. That's where a major portion of our stuff sells. Once again, we can't get played on radio, so we sell our CDs and DVDs of our shows online because they're the only two avenues we have so we utilize them as much as we can.

DM - Are the sales online at the shows are they as good as what they used to be on radio?

RH - Oh no. I mean, they're very good, I mean, selling in the millions as far as our career is concerned, would take, like it was in the past, a major radio or television push. And you know, that ain't gonna happen.

DM - Right. I wanted to ask you, you've been doing this for almost 40 years and for the kid with a band out there somewhere who loves your style of music and you know is trying to break into the business, what would you tell them?

RH - I think that the most important thing for anybody that included us as well and had done because our career has gone through three or four stages of being amazingly great and then not so good, just perseverance. I mean, if you've got the talent to write songs to begin with, which I should say has to be a given, just get your music to as many people as you can. Get it online, YouTube it, you know, take stuff to radio stations. Get advice from people in the business who are good people. You know, as far as management and agencies are concerned,

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it's very important to surround yourself with the best people you can.

DM – Right, And I understand it's a broad question it but I was just thinking about you know a kid with you know some buddies and they want to start band and then they probably don't have any idea the interpersonal dynamics in the turmoil and you know the pleasure and the fame or not. And I always try to ask that question because a lot of people like me who never started a band always admired people who did and always admired people who became successful. But when I read the paper about band breakups or people leaving in a huff or management problems or you know, who to be the leader of the band, whose going to write, whose going to sing, whose going to do this, it always seems to be working with people seems to be almost as important as being able to make a music.

RH – Well it is. We're very lucky once again. We've had a blessed relationship in and out of the band between Graham and myself. I don't have any allusions about writing songs. I never did approach a project where I said I want my song on the album and there's too many of yours. We know who is going to sing what. There's no competition whatsoever between us because the two of us is Air Supply, not one of us. We respect each other. We make all of the business decisions together even though it's Graham's musical vision certainly. And the way the songs are presented, we just have that simpatico thing going on. I love everything he does and writes. But that's just the way it is. We never worked at having this relationship, it just happened once we met each other and realized the things we had in common musically and personally. It's just been a great ride for both of us.

DM – Sounds ideal. I do have one more question. I heard interview with, you had mentioned the Rolling Stones earlier and I heard interviewed Stones on NPR and I mean that I know they agreed to do the interview but a lot of the questions at the reporter asked them, they didn't seem to remember and it just seem like they weren't really in engage in interview, like they were bored with it. And I wanted to ask you, what's it like to put yourself out there to people like me all the time? I mean, is it something you look forward to, it is a necessary evil and for all the people who might interview you in the future, what would you say them about what not to do in order to guarantee a good interview with you guys?

RH - Well I think you know, the biggest thing for me with doing interviews is, you know, I think someone who is intelligent, which clearly you are. You've done research which is most important. I mean, we did a press tour for one of our projects probably 15 years ago and I think we had released our 15th album or 14th album, I don't know which it was. And the guy sat down and he said to me, is this your first album, which was insulting. I mean, when you get asked questions like that, you just tune out. In fact, Graham said to the guy, which was

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nice of him because he's not usually that polite to idiots, he said why don't you go home, and do some research on us and come back and do this tomorrow.

Because obviously if you think this is our first recording, then probably everything else you're going to ask is not going to work out for you.

DM – Right.

RH – But as far as the interview process is concerned, I appreciate you taking the time to do it, as anyone else that speaks to me or Graham or both of us. I appreciate every fan we have. I mean, I can honestly say I've never refused an autograph or a photo if I could do it. We meet fans after every show that we can to get feedback from them and sign things for them because you know, it's all part of being supported by you and other interviewers and media and fans that afford me, you know, the career that I've had. And I would never say, god I'm too tired for this or do I have to do this again. I mean, you know, some interviews are borderline being boring because the person interviewing you is boring.

DM – Right

RH – But I always like to think that we are a good interview, that we don't usually come forward with yes or no answers. I've seen that from time to time.

DM – Oh yeah.

RH – But you know, the Stones are the Stones. They've probably been around 10 or 15 years longer than we have, maybe they weren't in the mood that day. But I always try to be engaging and I look forward to talking to people who have something to say, and you do. So, thank you.

DM – I'm Don Merrill, and I've been talking with Russell Hitchcock. He and Graham Russell make up Air Supply. Thanks for listening.

Song – Just As I Am