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Gary Brooker of Procol Harum Discusses First New Album in 14 Years



Gus Stewart/Redferns

Gary Brooker of Procol Harum performs at The Royal Festival Hall on March 3, 2017 in London

There are plenty of lame excuses for taking 14 years between albums. But **Procol Harum's Gary Brooker** certainly has some good ones.

The venerable British group behind classic rock smashes like "Conquistador" and "Whiter Shade Of Pale" releases *Novum*, their first new album in 14 years, on April 21 via Eagle Rock Entertainment, and Brooker spent a chunk of that interim incapacitated. About six years ago, he reckons, the frontman "fell off a log pile in Finland and snapped five ribs, I think. Clean in half. I couldn't hardly breathe let alone sing, for quite a few months." That was followed three years later by an incident in South Africa where he was unwittingly drugged, and wound up with a fractured skull that took a long time to heal.

"Apart from that," he quips, "I started to feel good. I now lock myself up. I don't go hardly anywhere now 'cause they all seem to be dangerous places, everything from a log pile to a quiet South African town to... Well, the stage is always a dangerous place."

And, indeed, last month Brooker injured his hand and nose when he slipped on some steps during a symphonic concert in England, though in admirable "It's just a flesh wound" spirit, he soldiered on to play the second half of the show.

Amidst all this, Brooker and company did manage to make *Novum*, an 11-song set featuring lyrics by Pete Brown of [Cream](#) fame. "We've been playing together for 10 years live, so it was about time we did something in the studio," Brooker says of the process, which began last August. "And we suddenly realized, because people started saying it, [that] we've been going 50 years this year. Fifty years! You can't let that go by. If ever there's a good moment to do something new, fresh, write new songs and get in the studio, it's now."

Novum is a true collaborative effort, according to Brooker, with songs written together by the group in the studio. "Somebody started something, me or somebody else, and if somebody else thought that was good they would jump in and we'd continue until it got to the end of its natural thing," Brooker recalls. "It was very much everybody working together and working off each other's ideas and also having a lot of respect and allowing freedom, not being, 'Oh, this is MY song!' There was none of that feeling about it at all."

Brown, meanwhile, had offered to work with Procol Harum over the years, and after seeing the lyricist again a couple of years ago, Brooker decided to throw some of the *Novum* songs Brown's way to see what he came up with.

"He was a very amenable person to work with, and able to change something if that was necessary," Brooker says. And Brown's work on *Novum* is notably more straightforward than some of his psychedelic world trips of the past. "They're more real, more about real things and not fantasy or anything like that," Brooker notes. "But I've had a lot of experience singing what you might call out-there lyrics, you know? 'We skipped the light fandango,' remember?"

Procol Harum begins a U.K. tour on May 6 in Edinburgh, Scotland, with European dates in the fall and more shows likely to be added to the list. Brooker isn't talking about another album yet, but he's as happy with the current state of Procol Harum as he's been with any other lineup in the group's history.

"I think I've got a soft spot for it somewhere," he says. "I still like singing and I like doing all the Procol songs, from 1967 right through to now. And it's always been people that enjoyed each other's company for the most part, and therefore it's a social club as well as a band. And we don't fall out anymore. We don't have arguments. We don't fight each other. It's become what I've always thought a band is supposed to be."